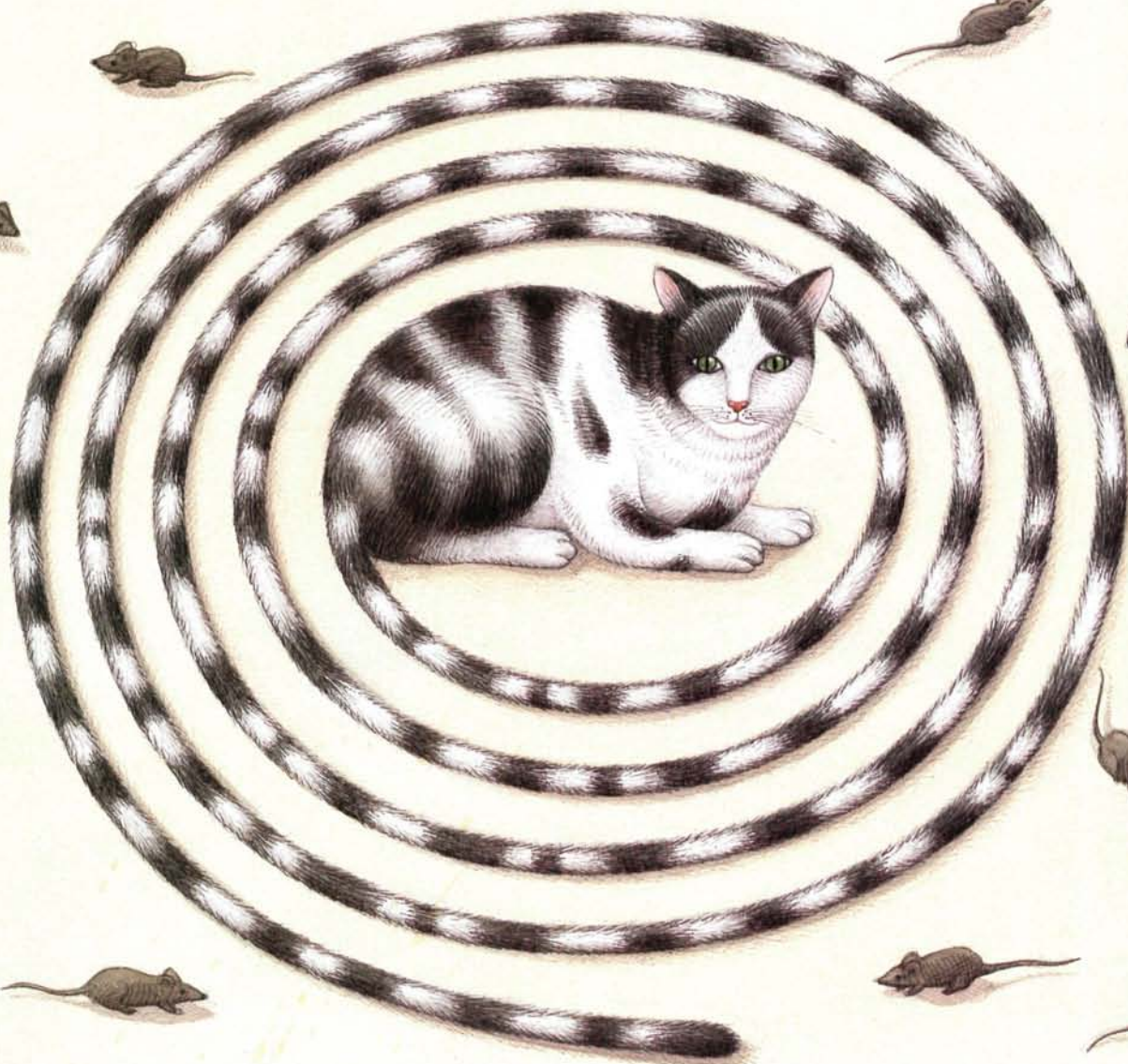


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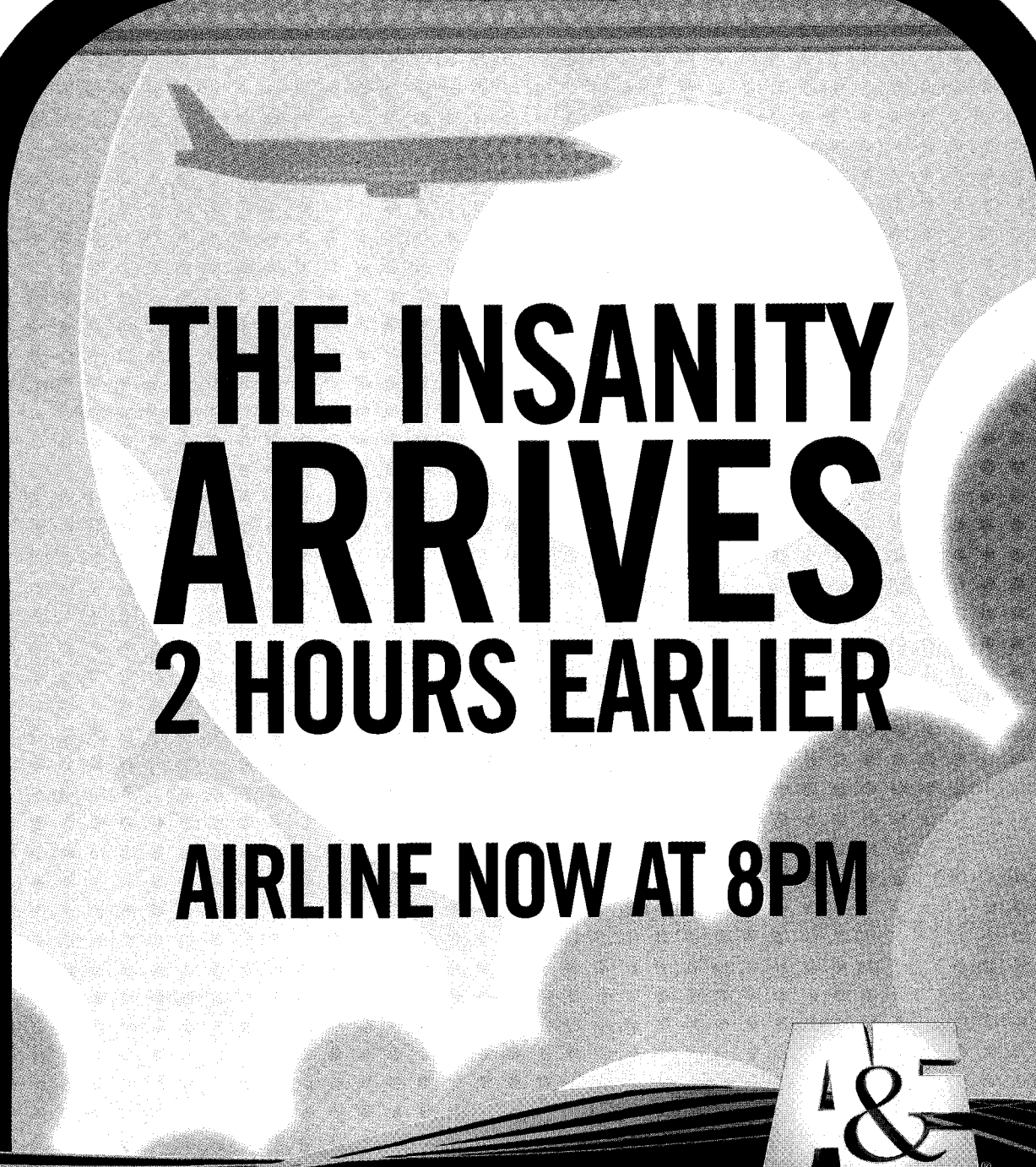
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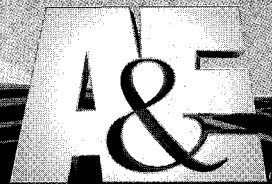
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Alex Ross (Musical Events, p. 74) received a 2004 ASCAP Deems Taylor Award for his *New Yorker* piece "Ghost Sonata." ♦



Victoria Roberts

"If you use up all your worry today, what will you have tomorrow?"

THE MAIL

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

I was pleased to read Atul Gawande's positive account of our work at the Minnesota Cystic Fibrosis Center ("The Bell Curve," December 6th). It should be emphasized, however, that while the wide spread in the quality of care that different hospitals offer is a real phenomenon, it is only one of the causes that affect outcomes in cystic-fibrosis cases. Many other factors lie beyond the control of those who work even in well-organized CF centers. There is the number and severity of CF-associated diseases that each patient has acquired by the time he or she is referred to a CF center. Poverty also plays a part: inadequate funds sometimes lead to patients' being seen irregularly. Even when patients have health insurance, someone whose provider changes each year might be seen only once by a given doctor, who will therefore be unable to spot a pattern of recurrent problems pointing to CF as the diagnosis. The bell curve of survival in CF cases is therefore vulnerable to misinterpretation. This is why, when the CF Patient Registry was founded, it was decided to record CF centers' results anonymously.

Warren J. Warwick, M.D.

*University of Minnesota Medical School
Minneapolis, Minn.*

The advancing standards of doctors specializing in cystic-fibrosis treatment which Gawande describes have interesting parallels in the field of anesthesiology. Nearly twenty years ago, the anesthesiologists at the Harvard Medical School teaching hospitals wrote standards for monitoring anesthetized patients in the hope that their use in all cases would reduce the number of resultant deaths and serious injuries. Soon afterward, the American Society of Anesthesiologists adopted similar standards for all its members—a surprise, because it was believed that members would resist being told how they should practice. Serendipitously, monitoring devices that continuously measured the amount of oxygen in the patient's blood

and the volume of ventilation were becoming available. Thirty years ago, approximately one patient in ten thousand died or suffered serious injury solely from the anesthetic. Today, in the United States, that number is so low that it would require a study of several million anesthetics to arrive at an accurate figure.

Gerald L. Zeitlin, M.D.

Chestnut Hill, Mass.

BALLOT POSTMORTEMS

The importance of the emphasis on "moral values" in the exit polls that Louis Menand describes ("Permanent Fatal Errors," December 6th) does not lie in its over-all percentage among the electorate (twenty-two per cent) but, rather, in its prevalence among Bush voters, four-fifths of whom identified it as the foremost element in their decision. This cannot be attributed solely to the use of a "closed-ended question"; in response to a spontaneous form of the question asked by the Pew poll that Menand elsewhere refers to, more than nine out of ten voters who mentioned moral values were Bush voters. An important principle in polling is that even though over-all percentages are shaped by question wording, differences between groups like Bush and Kerry supporters are almost always stable, regardless of question wording. So although an emphasis on "moral values" may not account for the increase in Bush's 2004 vote over his 2000 vote, it does explain an important part of his support in both years, and must be considered seriously by Democrats who hope to win in the future.

Howard Schuman

Survey Research Center

University of Michigan

Ann Arbor, Mich.

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



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THIS WEEK SOUTHERN MEN

Drive-By Truckers, a brawny, brainy Southern-rock outfit from Alabama, have spent the last half-decade turning out a series of superb albums rich in regional mythology. The band's most recent record, "The Dirty South," includes songs that pay tribute to artists like Carl Perkins and the Band, and there are two songs about Buford Pusser, the no-nonsense Tennessee sheriff immortalized by the film "Walking Tall." The Truckers will play

a pair of concerts this week at the Bowery Ballroom, the first just after Patti Smith's traditional New Year's Eve show and the second later that day. (See Night Life.)

COLD RUSH

It's fairly well known that on New Year's Day, members of the Coney Island Polar Bear Club take a dip in the Atlantic. But that doesn't diminish the courage (or insanity) it takes to strip off your clothes, brave the winter wind, and dash into the frigid ocean. A few dozen Polar Bears meet every Sunday, but on New Year's Day they have company—more than three hundred swimmers took the plunge last year, with more than four thousand spectators looking on. The daredevilry will be accompanied by a performance

from the feisty Brooklyn-based Hungry March Band, and a special vintage subway train (complete with rattan seats and bare-bulb lighting) will make the trip from Columbus Circle to Coney Island. (See Above and Beyond.)

TRICKY FLICK

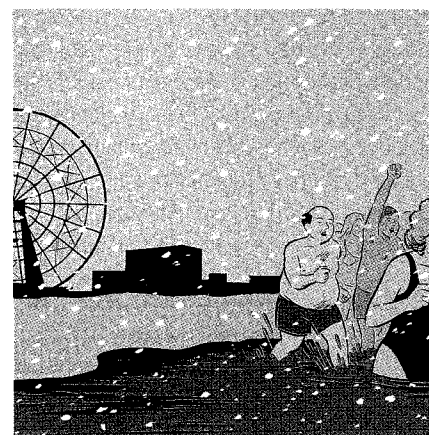
"The Assassination of Richard Nixon" was inspired by the true story of Samuel Bicke, a failed businessman who in 1974 attempted to crash an airliner into the White House. An able cast—Sean Penn (as Bicke), Naomi Watts (as his wife), and Don Cheadle (as his best friend)—anchors the dramatization of this dark historical footnote; the film marks the directorial debut of Niels Mueller. (Opening Dec. 29; see Movies.)



Drive-By Truckers play a pair of shows on New Year's Day.



Sean Penn stars in the political drama "The Assassination of Richard Nixon."



The Coney Island Polar Bear Club hosts a special New Year's Day swim.

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THE THEATRE OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

GOOD VIBRATIONS

More than thirty songs by Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys form the backdrop for this musical, about a group of East Coast teen-agers who head west in search of surf and sun. Directed and choreographed by John Carrafa. In previews. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

LITTLE WOMEN

Sutton Foster ("Thoroughly Modern Millie") is Jo and Maureen McGovern is Marmee, in a new musical inspired by Louisa May Alcott's novel about four American sisters of the Civil War era. Book by Alan Knee, lyrics by Mindi Dickstein, and music by Jason Howland. Directed by Susan H. Schulman and choreographed by Michael Lichtfeld. In previews. (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AFTER THE BALL

The Irish Repertory Theatre follows up last summer's gem of a production of "Finian's Rainbow" with the American première of a musical written by Noël Coward fifty years ago, based on Oscar Wilde's "Lady Windermere's Fan." Now we can admire forgotten Coward lyrics ("contumely" rhymes with "gloomily"; "daffier" with "raffa") and hear Wilde's acid reflections on the male sex delivered in dulcet tones by the lovely, clear-voiced Kristin Huxhold. As with "Finian's Rainbow," the Irish Rep has altered the material to fit the Rep's jewel-box theatre. The adaption, a deft, inspired job by Barry Day, adds a narrator, the Duchess of Berwick (the winningly assured Kathleen Widdoes), to introduce the scenes and speed the action. The result is a modest yet disarming piece, performed by an exceptional cast. Tony Walton directs. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

BELLE ÉPOQUE

Martha Clarke and Charles L. Mee's music-and-dance exploration of Toulouse-Lautrec (Mark Povinelli) at the Moulin Rouge is a study of the erotic grotesque, in a Weillian mood. The production is darkly imagined; dancers in louche attire (notably, Tomé Cousin, as Chocolat, and the gorgeous Gabrielle Malone, as Marie) wheel across the stage as a marvellous onstage ensemble plays period-appropriate music on violin, cello, French horn, tuba, bandoneon, and piano. The most memorable feature of the production is a bawdy, prating prose poem that La Goulue (Ruth Maleczek, dressed in wide, blowy tiers of ruffles) recites about her . . . cat. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center 212-239-6200. Through Jan. 9.)

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Notionally a musical retelling of "A Winter's Tale," this collaboration between the composer Diedre Murray ("Running Man"), the librettist and lyricist Randy Weiner, and the writer-director Diane Paulus is more of a gospel-funk oratorio. The story centers on a jealous king (Charles R. King, Jr.), a slandered queen (Jeannette Bayardelle), and a cast-off child named Rain (Kenita R. Miller). Exiled from the kingdom of Groovonia, Rain takes refuge in the red-light district of nearby Funktopia, which looks a lot like Bourbon Street. Murray's robust score, performed by a scorching four-piece band and sung by a tuneful cast, makes the rafters shake. (Julia Miles, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200. Through Jan. 2.)

LA CAGE AUX FOLLES

The show never shakes off a certain French rigidity (fancy parlors, excessive politesse), but there's plenty of esprit to go around in this revival of the 1983 production by Jerry Herman and Harvey Fierstein, based on the French film, in which a gay couple try not to spook their son's bigoted prospective in-laws. Gary Beach, as Albin, the high-strung "wife" of the dapper Georges (Daniel Davis), is in

fine voice (he evokes Nathan Lane's performance in the American film version, "The Birdcage"), and Michael Benjamin Washington shines, playing the couple's vivacious cross-dressing maid, Jacob. But the real stars of this production are William Ivey Long's splendid costumes and the high-kicking, lissome showgirls, choreographed by Jerry Mitchell, who are, of course, showboys—and who give the Rockettes a run for their money. (Marquis, Broadway at 46th St. 212-307-4100.)

DEMOCRACY

A strong production of Michael Frayn's play about the popular German Chancellor Willy Brandt (James Naughton) and the East German mole Günter Guillaume (Richard Thomas), who served him and eventually sank him. Directed by Michael Blakemore. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

DOUBT

A compelling melodrama about possible sexual abuse in a Catholic school that pits a battle-axe mother superior against a popular priest. John Patrick Shanley's well-told tale is a meditation on the dangers and importance of skepticism. The cast is superb—the rebarbative Cherry Jones dukes it out with a charismatic Brian F. O'Byrne while Heather Goldenhersh tempers the simmering cauldron of ill will with her fetching sweetness. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/13/04.) (Manhattan Theatre Club at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

FAT PIG

A man tries to muster the courage to date an overweight woman, in a new play by Neil LaBute. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

THE FOREIGNER

Larry Shue's chestnut about a shy Brit named Charlie who spends three days in a hillbilly hideaway is given delirious life by the physical clowning of Matthew Broderick (as Charlie), by Byron Jennings, as his chum "Froggy" LeSueur (in knesocks and khaki shorts), and especially by Kevin Cahoon, as a half-wit named Ellard, whose goggle-eyed loquaciousness gives Don Knotts a run for his money. Directed by Scott Schwartz. (Roundabout at Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

FRANKENSTEIN

Mary Shelley's horror story is adapted by the Flying Machine, in a multimedia production directed by Joshua Carlbach. (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 212-868-7444.)

GEM OF THE OCEAN

Set in the Hill District of Pittsburgh in 1904, "Gem" is the latest, and the introductory, installment to August Wilson's magnificent ten-play cycle, in which each play dramatizes a decade of the roiling African-American experience of the twentieth century. As the play opens, Citizen Barlow (John Earl Jelks), a young man born into freedom and named for its promise, bursts into the home of Aunt Ester Tyler (Phylicia Rashad), a two-hundred-and-eighty-five-year-old conjure woman who is the repository of the race's historical memory. Aunt Ester's mission is to transmit a sense of the past into Citizen's soul. As Ester, Rashad turns in an eerily inspired performance of old age. She has abdicated glamour and the desire to be adorable; as a result, detachment and coyness give way to daring and compassion. Well directed by Kenny Leon. (12/20 & 27/04) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

LONE STAR LOVE

The Amas Musical Theatre reinvents Shakespeare's "The Merry Wives of Windsor" as a hokey Western hoedown, setting it in a small Texas prairie town in 1865. A few of the songs, by Jack Herrick of the Red Clay Ramblers, are real beauties, but the script is studded with groan-worthy jokes. Directed by Michael Bogdanov and choreographed by Randy Skinner. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

MODERN ORTHODOX

In Daniel Goldfarb's faith-based romantic comedy, Herschel Klein (Jason Biggs) is a caricature of the prototypical modern Orthodox Jew. A diamond salesman, he wears a yarmulke with a Yankees logo, and when he rides city buses he makes sure he's facing Jerusalem. Nonetheless, when a nonobservant ring buyer, Ben (Craig Bierko), tests his faith during a deal, he caves to clinch the sale. Biggs, well cast, car-

ries off Klein's agonized post-transaction conflict with humor and chutzpah, and Jenn Harris gives a wacky, pleasingly steamy performance as Klein's romantic prospect. With Molly Ringwald as Ben's fiancée, Hannah Ziggelstein. James Lapine directs. (Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

9 PARTS OF DESIRE

Heather Raffo's remarkable one-woman show, which bears witness to Iraqi women's political oppression, is an example of how art can remake the world and eloquently name pain. Based on research and dozens of interviews conducted on four continents over eleven years (Raffo portrays nine women in the course of the evening), the play brings news of the psychic life of the brutalized and allows us to think about the unthinkable. Directed by Joanna Settle. (11/8/04) (Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200.)

A NUMBER

Sam Shepard, seated at one end of a leather couch, undergoes a series of awkward confrontations with a number of his cloned offspring (all played with haunting credibility and both subtle and unsubtle differences by Dallas Roberts). The production's appeal has more to do with the gravitational pull of Shepard's charisma and the nuanced neediness Roberts projects (in each incarnation) than with Caryl Churchill's writing, which feels both spare and repetitive—less like a play than a series of variations on one thesis. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

PACIFIC OVERTURES

In the Roundabout Theatre revival of Stephen Sondheim and Hal Prince's musical from 1976 (about Commodore Perry's gunboat diplomacy with Japan) at Studio 54, Amon Miyamoto's direction is elegant; he uses Junko Koshino's well-designed costumes to make minimal but powerful stage pictures. The production's sense of visual and emotional reserve brings with it a certain aridity: one longs for a touch of American vulgarity. (12/13/04) (254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

THE RIVALS

Mark Lamos directs a revival of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's comedy of manners, starring Brian Murray, Emily Bergl, Richard Easton, Matt Letscher, and as Mrs. Malaprop, Dana Ivey. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center 212-239-6200.)

A SECOND HAND MEMORY

Woody Allen's powerful tale of the deferred dreams of a Jewish Brooklyn family in the nineteen-fifties, which Allen also directs, takes its title from the cobbled recollections of the romantic, peripatetic narrator, Alma Wolfe (Elizabeth Marvel), who has been banished from the family and travels the world in search of love and experience. But most of the characters, notably Lou (Dominic Chianese) and Diane (the fetching Erica Leerhsen), struggle under the weight of other people's desires—obligations that turn out to be secondhand. (12/6/04) (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

700 SUNDAYS

Billy Crystal's Broadway debut, an affectionate memoir of his boyhood on Long Island, centers on his father, who managed a jazz-record shop and died of a heart attack when Crystal was fifteen. The show is a kind of "It's a Wonderful Yiddishe Life"—tender and funny, it brings together physical comedy, home movies, and nostalgic music. Written by Crystal, with additional material by Alan Zweibel. Directed by Des McAnuff. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

SOUVENIR

A new play by Stephen Temperley, about the eccentric socialite Florence Foster Jenkins, who gave terrible recitals at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel and Carnegie Hall in the nineteen-forties. Judy Kaye plays the benighted songstress. Directed by Vivian Matalon and conducted by Jack Lee. (York Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-868-4444.)

ALSO PLAYING

AGA-BOOM

New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Through Jan. 16.

AVENUE Q

Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

THE BALTIMORE WALTZ

Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St.
212-244-7529. (Through Jan. 9.)

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.

BOMBAY DREAMS

Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St.
212-239-6200. (Closes Jan. 1.)

BROOKLYN: THE MUSICAL

Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

BUG

Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St.,
at Seventh Ave. 212-239-6200.

CHICAGO

Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St.
212-239-6200.

DAME EDNA: BACK WITH A VENGEANCE!

Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

DAVE GORMAN'S

GOOGLEWHACK! ADVENTURE

Village Theatre, 158 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100.

42ND STREET

Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.
(Closes Jan. 2.)

GOLDA'S BALCONY

Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
(Closes Jan. 2.)

HAIRSPRAY

Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.

JEWTOPIA

Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.

MAMMA MIA!

Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St.
212-563-5544.

MOVIN' OUT

Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St.
212-307-4100.

NEWSICAL

Upstairs at Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St.
212-307-4100.

'NIGHT, MOTHER

Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

THE PRODUCERS

St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

SLAVA'S SNOWSHOW

Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St.
212-505-0700.

STOMP

Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St.
212-477-2477.

TRYING

Promenade, Broadway at 76th St.
212-239-6200.

TWELVE ANGRY MEN

American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St.
212-719-1300.

WHOOPI

Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

WICKED

Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.

WONDERFUL TOWN

Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

In Balanchine's "Nutcracker" (now celebrating its fiftieth anniversary), the Christmas party is gemütlich, the nightmare scary, the tree tall, and Candyland just what it should be: a child's dream of heaven. Tchaikovsky wrote the music at the peak of his powers as a fabulist, and Balanchine's imagination rose to meet it. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Dec. 28 and Dec. 30 at 6, Dec. 29 at 2 and 6, and Jan. 2 at 1 and 5.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE

Highlights of the final week of the company's season at City Center include "Shining Star," a series of duets by David Parsons, set to the good-times sounds of Earth, Wind & Fire; "Love Stories," a collage of dances by Judith Jamison, Robert Battle, and the hip-hop master Rennie Harris, choreographed to the



The rousing local ensemble Gogol Bordello rings in the New Year at Northsix.

songs of Stevie Wonder; and a new production of Ailey's 1973 "Hidden Rites," which shows the choreographer in Martha Graham mode, arranging staccato, hieratic gestures in a dramatic ritual. ♦ Dec. 28 at 7 and Dec. 29 at 8: "Ailey Classics." ♦ Dec. 29 at 2: "Heart Song," "Juba," and "Bounty Verses." ♦ Dec. 30 at 8: "Memoria," "Hidden Rites," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 31 at 7:30: "Shining Star," "Love Stories," and "Revelations." ♦ Jan. 1 at 8: "Love Stories," "Hidden Rites," and "Revelations." ♦ Jan. 2 at 3 and 7:30: "Following the Subtle Current Upstream," "Treading," "Juba," and "Revelations." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

LES BALLETS TROCKADERO DE MONTE CARLO

The all-male troupe brings its hilarious ballet satires to the Joyce, with two alternating programs. Program A includes "Les Sylphides," "Go for Barocco," "Dying Swan," and the underwater scene from "The Humpback Horse." Program B includes "Swan Lake" (Act II), "Dying Swan," "L'École de Ballet," and the Pina Bausch parody "I wanted to dance with you at the Café of Experience." (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Program A: Dec. 30 at 8, Dec. 31 at 5, and Jan. 2 at 3 and 7:30. Program B: Dec. 27-29 at 8.)

SAVION GLOVER

In his thrilling season at the Joyce a year ago, tap's reigning star was full of surprises. Usually introverted, he let loose his charm and found a natural, uningratiating way to share his joy in dancing. He even sang a little. Returning to the Chelsea theatre for another three weeks, Glover now follows up on those breakthrough performances. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 4 at 8. Through Jan. 23.)

NIGHT LIFE CONCERTS

STRING CHEESE INCIDENT

The popular Colorado outfit known on the jam-band circuit for its mix of bluegrass and other rural influences hits the big city. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 212-247-4777. Dec. 28-29 at 8 and Dec. 31 at 9.)

GOV'T MULE

The guitarist Warren Hayes can be linked to almost every other musician out there, via his stints as a member of the Dead and the Allman Brothers, as a solo artist, and as the leader of this blues-rock outfit, which has recorded albums with Bootsy Collins, Flea, John Entwistle, Les Claypool, and more than two dozen other bassists. Hayes and company recently returned from the studio with an album of solid rockers, "Déjà Voodoo," that hints at why he's so well connected. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 212-307-7171. Dec. 30 at 8 and Dec. 31 at 9.)

WILCO

America's premier alternative-country band became one of the country's leading indie-rock phenomena thanks to its 2002 album, "Yankee Hotel Foxtrot." The band continued its adventurous ascent with this year's release, "A Ghost Is Born," and now they're playing Madison Square Garden, a big room that's usually reserved for hirsute arena rockers. The equally beloved and eclectic Flaming Lips and the fiercely independent trio Sleater-Kinney will help fill the seats. (212-307-7171. Dec. 31 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BARBÈS

376 9th St., Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—Dec. 30: The former national flat-picking champion Orrin Star brings his guitar, banjo, and mandolin to the intimate back room of this Park Slope watering hole. Dec. 31: The Zagnut Cirkus Orkestar, a rowdy Balkan brass band, rings in the New Year.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Dec. 29: The idea of a full-scale Pink Floyd reunion is an elusive flight of fancy, but the local tribute band the Machine painstakingly replicates the music of the defunct British art-rock juggernauts. Their striking mimicry has even impressed the erstwhile Floyd producer Bob Ezrin. Dec. 30: Zilla, a quartet that includes Michael Travis, the drummer for the String Cheese Incident (see Concerts). Dec. 31: If anyone knows how to handle an enthusiastic crowd, it's the timelessly sexy night-club singer Eartha Kitt.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Dec. 29-31: The intense, unpredictable, and exuberant rocker Patti Smith and her band. Later on New Year's Eve and again on Jan. 1: Drive-By Truckers (see This Week).

CBGB & OMFUG

315 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (212-982-4052)—Dec. 31: The local boys in the Star Spangles play rough-hewn rock and roll that owes a huge debt to such early-seventies punk icons as the Ramones (with whom they've shared a producer). Their mission is far from original, but their popularity demonstrates that youthful nihilism and teen angst never go out of style.

IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Dec. 29: Clutch may not be a household name, but the Maryland alternative-metal band's eccentric and sarcastic hard rock (more Zappa than Zeppelin) has won them a devoted following. The band is full of accomplished musicians, and their improvisational jam sessions run the risk of being too clever for their own musical community. Dec. 30: The saxophonist Maceo Parker, a veteran of James Brown's legendary JBs and a pivotal member of the Parliament/Funkadelic empire. Dec. 31: A night of theatrical rock and roll as the instrumental electronica-funk and self-proclaimed "space porn" band Particle shares a bill with a few friends. Buckthead is an intense funk-metal guitarist whose playing transcends his costume—a Kentucky Fried Chicken container worn over his head. The Japanese punk band Peeland Z leavens its performances with colorful outfits and stunts like human bowling. Kaiju Big Battel eschews music for pure performance. The Boston-based troupe stages high-concept spectacles—the soup fights the sandwich, for example (which will reign supreme at the lunch table?)—that are rooted in low-tech productions: the shows feature monsters, aliens, and giant crushable cityscapes.

JOE'S PUB

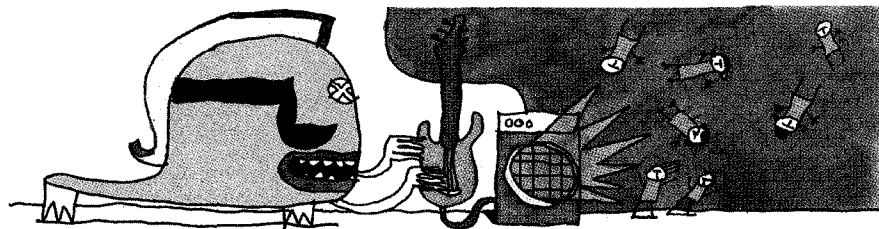
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Dec. 28-30: Jill Sobule, a feisty post-punk feminist whose work brings to mind a cross between Liz Phair and Gertrude Stein, plays the early show; Lloyd Cole, a dark, glowering, and frequently brilliant Scotsman, follows. Dec. 31: The veteran New York City rocker Garland Jeffreys. Jan. 1-2: The folk-rock troubadour Steve Forbert. Jan. 4: The Chanteuse Club brings together Kate Pierson, of the B-52's, Gail Ann Dorsey, a veteran of David Bowie's bands, and Maggie Moore, formerly of the Off Broadway musical "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," for a night of acoustic revelry.

NORTHSIX

66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—Dec. 31: Gogol Bordello. Eugene Hutz is the charismatic front man of this local group with Eastern European roots whose grandly anarchic

POP NOTES

Favorites from our 2004 CD rotation, listed alphabetically.



The Arcade Fire, "Funeral" (Merge)—This Montreal band is more like a commune, and their sound reflects it: all the members sing, and their instruments include violin, accordion, mandolin, and flute. The result is reminiscent of Echo and the Bunnymen, if they had been popular during the Depression. And though the album was made during a period when several band members suffered deaths in their families there's more joyous urgency than melancholy.

Dizzee Rascal, "Showtime" (XL)—American rappers paying attention to Dizzee Rascal and other m.c.s from East London should be getting pretty nervous right now. The music is minimal and rough, but it changes in mood to match Dizzee Rascal's emotional, metrically nimble rhyming; it feels alive in a way that little else does.

The Futureheads, "The Futureheads" (Warner)—Imagine a band with the nervy melodic genius of the young XTC, sharp lyrics about the anomie of the modern world, and urgent four-part harmonies. At their best ("Carnival Kids," "The City Is Here for You to Use," a cover of Kate Bush's "Hounds of Love"), the Futureheads make a strong case that they're the most exciting British band of the moment.

The Hives, "Tyrannosaurus Hives" (Interscope)—Three years ago, when they released "Veni Vidi Vicious," the Swedish band was grouped with the White Stripes and the Strokes in the so-called garage-rock revival. With the former firmly canonized and the popularity of the latter on the wane, the Hives have returned with a tightly written and explosively performed follow-up that's brash, bratty, and gimmicky, yet somehow genuine.

Van Hunt, "Van Hunt" (Capitol)—Hunt's father was both a painter and a pimp, and evidently his skills were passed on—Hunt uses a palette rich with classic soul, and he makes his influences work for him in sensual, sometimes dark ways. On the strength of songs like "Dust" and "Down Here in Hell (With You)," Hunt's debut can stand proudly alongside the best work of Raphael Saadiq or D'Angelo.

Jorge Ben Jor, "Reactivus Amor Est [Turba Philosophorum]" (Universal)—The legendary Brazilian composer, who first hit it big in 1963 with "Mas Que Nada," sails into his fifth decade of recording stardom with this hypnotically smooth funk-samba collection. Beautiful and cool, it's music from the streets of Rio that's been refined for high-rise cocktail parties.

concerts of Slavic-tinged Gypsy punk have hipsters everywhere brushing up their Romany. He's also held court on a regular basis around town as a d.j., spinning an eclectic mix of trans-global music that has attracted an equally rabid bunch of fans. His latest project is J.U.F. (short for "Jewish-Ukrainian Freundschaft"), a collaboration with Tamir Muskat, the drummer for the noirish instrumental trio Big Lazy. The two enlisted some like-minded friends and combed a wide variety of record bins for the new album "Gogol Bordello vs. Tamir Muskat." The rousing result sounds like something along the lines of a joint gig between a Gypsy wedding band, the Sex Pistols, the Jamaican dub impresario King Tubby, and Kraftwerk.

SOUTHPAW

125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—Dec. 31: Luna. After the guitarist and singer Dean Wareham disbanded Galaxie 500, in the early

Tift Merritt, "Tambourine" (Lost Highway)—Merritt's 2002 debut, "Bramble Rose," marked her as a promising alt-country singer. Her sophomore effort is a great leap forward into soul-tinged rock and roll that sounds like an update of "Dusty in Memphis"—or, less distantly, the early solo work of Maria McKee. George Drakoulis, who has worked country-rock magic for McKee, the Black Crowes, and the Jayhawks, produced.

U2, "How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb" (Interscope)—The atomic bomb of the title is metaphorical, mostly; it's the anger and frustration of modern life. On their eleventh album, the Irish supergroup supplies a soothing musical remedy, short on experimentation but long on the redemptive power of rock and roll. The Edge's guitar lines shower sparks on the anthemic arrangements, and Bono's voice retains its righteous beauty.

Tom Waits, "Real Gone" (Anti)—In which Waits sets aside his piano and continues to search for the aural equivalent of outsider art. Here, it comprises plenty of dirt-under-the-nails guitar (courtesy of Marc Ribot) and unhinged human beatboxing (courtesy of Waits). The sonic confidence is matched by charged, topical songs. "Hoist That Rag" wallows American imperialism; the lengthy "Sins of the Father" contemplates absolution. And there's even a whacked-out dance number ("Metropolitan Glide").

Kanye West, "The College Dropout" (Roc-A-Fella)—On his solo debut after years as a producer, West delivers one of the most ambitious hip-hop albums in recent memory. On "Through the Wire," West raps about the car accident that almost ended his life—through the wired-shut jaw that resulted from that accident. "Slow Jamz," the uproarious collaboration with the speed-rapper Twista, is also here, along with clear-eyed inquiries into education, spirituality, and the materialism of rap culture—and (ambition has a downside) a few too many windy skits.

Gretchen Wilson, "Here for the Party" (Epic)—Every year, Nashville offers up a dozen great women singers who never reach beyond country music's borders. This year, one did, and she deserved every crossover dollar. Wilson is a generously gifted singer with no use for either restraint or hysteria. Her stories about ass-kicking and rebel-yelling may not prove she's the redneck she claims she is, but you'll certainly want to hear what she says on the next record about moving out of the trailer.

nineties, he started Luna, which emulated classic New York bands like Television and the Velvet Underground. Band members came and went, but Wareham's songwriting rarely faltered. Luna's newly released record, "Rendezvous," is its last. With the three-part harmonies and acoustic guitars of the local act Maplewood.

WEBSTER HALL

125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Dec. 28-29: The youthful singer-songwriter John Mayer has scored well with two albums over the past three years of guitar-driven pop full of plangent self-deprecation. He's sold millions of records and won a Grammy, and now he has his own self-titled talk show, on VH-1. But it's not clear how all of this prepares him for these shows, in which he plans to explore the blues. Corey Harris, a guitarist who has devoted his career to the form, will be on hand to help steer Mayer straight.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL

59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through Dec. 30: It isn't difficult to imagine the elegant chanteuse **Andrea Marcovicci** as one of Fred Astaire's partners swirling through an R.K.O. musical of the thirties. Marcovicci has no doubt imagined the very same thing, and her new program features the great screen (and stage) songs written for the Master.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Through Dec. 31: **Cassandra Wilson**, our leading jazz diva, may be able to stamp any song with her own imprint, but she has a special place in her heart for traditional blues. On New Year's Eve, the guitarist **John Cephas** and the harmonica player **Phil Wiggins** will get Wilson in that down-home mood.

CARLYLE HOTEL

Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wrap-around murals, and, through Dec. 31, **Bobby Short**.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Through Jan. 2: The spirited pianist **Cyrus Chestnut** is joined by the alto-saxophone legend **Frank Morgan** and the trumpeter **Marcus Printup**.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY

540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—The pianist **Michael Feinstein** (here through Dec. 31) closes out his holiday run on New Year's Eve with the vocalist **Ann Hampton Callaway**.

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Dec. 29-Jan. 2: **Spyro Gyra** celebrates more than three decades of lite jazz. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul**. The **Mingus Big Band** is here on Tuesdays.

LE JAZZ AU BAR

41 E. 58th St. (212-308-9455)—Dec. 30-Jan. 9: Illness kept the vocal legend **Shirley Horn** from accompanying herself on the piano at shows earlier this year, but she's feeling better and will be back at the keyboards. She's a minimalist of awesome power who can still flatten an audience with the merest whisper.

JAZZ GALLERY

290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—Starting Dec. 29: "The Trumpet Shall Sound" celebrates the instrument with **Roy Hargrove**. **Charles Tolliver** joins in on Dec. 29, and the indefatigable **Clark Terry** helps liven things up on Dec. 30. Hargrove brings along the pianist **Stephen Scott** and others to greet the New Year.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Through Dec. 31: **Christian McBride**, the most gifted bassist of his generation, leads his long-running quartet. The vocalist **Melissa Walker** joins him on New Year's Eve.

SWEET RHYTHM

88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—Dec. 31: The **Hiram Bullock** band. Funk and fusion are second nature to the guitarist and singer **Bullock**, who may be best remembered from his days in **David Letterman's** house band.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through Jan. 2: **Dr. Michel White**. The clarinetist and musicologist **White** is a proud scion of New Orleans who celebrates the riches of jazz's first golden era. His exuberant renditions of classics by **Armstrong**, **Bechet**, **King Oliver**, and other **Big Easy** icons are sure to bring sunshine to our wintry city. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—Leopard prints, ostrich plumes, buckskin, snakeskin, peacock feathers, and the occasional taxidermied bird—"Wild: Fashion Untamed" presents a zoo of options

for adorning the body with bestial glamour. More than a hundred costumes ranging from the eighteenth century to today display a profusion of patterns and silhouettes, some decorated with iridescent feathers or beetles' wings, others draped in butter-soft leathers or furs with muzzles and claws attached. Capes, wings, tails, and masks abound, as designers from **Alaïa** to **Yamamoto** dress women for roles as predator, social butterfly, sex kitten, bird in a gilded cage. Through March 13. ♦ "William Kentridge," an exhibition of film, etchings, and drawings by the South African artist. Through April 10. ♦ "Gilbert Stuart." Through Jan. 16. ♦ "Princely Splendor: The Dresden Court, 1580-1620." Through Jan. 30. ♦ Coincident with the Whitney's retrospective, the Met showcases a choice handful of works from its permanent collection in "Romare Bearden at the Met." Through March 6. ♦ A wealth of art and artifacts recovered from the tombs of ancient luminaries is on view in "China: Dawn of a Golden Age, 200-750 A.D." Through Jan. 23. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—The museum has reopened in its renovated and enlarged home and is presenting a series of exhibits related to its metamorphosis. ♦ "Yoshio Taniguchi: Nine Museums" celebrates the architect and his previous art-housing projects, of which the new Modern is the first outside Japan. Through Jan. 31. ♦ The museum is built on the remains of three once adjacent buildings—**John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s** town house (the museum's second home, from 1932 to 1938), **John D. Rockefeller, Sr.'s** town house, and the **Dorset Hotel**. During construction of the new Taniguchi building, the museum invited **Mark Dion** to dig in the rubble beneath the sculpture garden, and his findings are presented in "Rescue Archeology," part of MOMA's contemporary "Projects" series. Elegantly cased in stainless-steel vitrines are artifacts from the buildings: bits of marble detailing, doorbells, suit buttons, a Budweiser can, a beautiful shard of green mosaic tile, a hotel-sized bar of **Blue Hedge Gift Soap**, still in its paper wrapping. Through March 14. ♦ "Michael Wesely: Open Shutter at the Museum of Modern Art." The German photographer turned his long exposure method (he has left the shutter open for as long as three years) on MOMA while it was under construction. Through mid-2005. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Fridays, 10:30 to 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—"The Aztec Empire" lines the Guggenheim's spiral with more than four hundred artifacts, from carvings depicting harvest work to implements for human sacrifice. Through Feb. 13. ♦ The Guggenheim has the largest collection of work by **Vasily Kandinsky** in the United States, and its curators have decided to devote one gallery to his work permanently. "Kandinsky Gallery: An Inaugural Selection" kicks things off. ♦ Among the artists represented in "Recent Acquisitions: Contemporary Sculpture" are **Maurizio Cattelan**, **Robert Gober**, and **Tom Friedman**. Through Jan. 27. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—"Isamu Noguchi: Master Sculptor." Through Jan. 16. ♦ "James Lee Byars: The Perfect Silence." Through March 6. ♦ The city's museums are full of **Romare Bearden's** work right now, but "The Art of Romare Bearden" is the biggest and most thorough show. Through Jan. 9. ♦ "Political Nature." Works on paper by **Walton Ford**, **Trenton Doyle Hancock**, **Frank Moore**, and **Stephanie Syjuco**. Through March 27. ♦ Once you know what you're looking for, "Bill Viola: Five Angels for the Millennium" becomes a game of waiting—and an addictive one at that. The viewer's attention is divided between five incandescent screens on which human figures—designated angels of Departing, Birth, Fire, Ascending, and Creation—occasionally crash through watery surfaces in ultra-slow motion. Images of the diving angels (often reversed for effect) are accompanied by a murky soundtrack that highlights their rising or sinking through empty space. Each takes its time to arrive, giving viewers a chance to reflect;

the darkened gallery becomes a quasi-religious space, like a Rothko Chapel for the digital age. Through March 6. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—"Totems to Turquoise: Native North American Jewelry Arts of the Northwest and Southwest." Through July 10. ♦ "Frogs: A Chorus of Colors" presents some two hundred frogs in glass-walled habitats. Through Jan. 9. ♦ "The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter." Through May 30. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Great Expectations: John Singer Sargent Painting Children." Included here are scenes of beaches and birthday parties and portraits of rich society kids and the progeny of Sargent's artistic peers. The children's luminous beauty is made poignant by wall texts describing what became of them amid the next century's wars and upheaval. Through Jan. 16. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

BUTLER LIBRARY, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Rare Book and Manuscript Library; enter at 115th St. at Broadway (212-854-5590)—"Jewels in Her Crown: Treasures from the Special Collections of Columbia's Libraries." A letter from **Abraham Lincoln** thanking the school for an honorary degree—he was too busy conducting the Civil War to collect it—shares shelf space with a cone-shaped cuneiform tablet circa 2060 B.C. from the ancient city of **Ur**. A German manual of military surgery, published in 1528, illustrates gory amputations, while **Marie Curie's** mortarboard represents more recent science. Note: Visitors without **Columbia I.D.** must gain building access through the Library Information Office. Through Jan. 28. (Open Mondays, noon to 4:45, and Tuesdays through Fridays, 9 to 4:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION

1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**Raphael's** lush and enigmatic nude portrait, "La Fornarina," is visiting the United States for the first time ever. Through Jan. 30. ♦ "European Bronzes from the Quentín Collection." Through Jan. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 1 to 6.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—"Innovator, Activist, Healer: The Art of **Friedl Dicker-Brandeis**." Through Jan. 16. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45; Thursdays, 11 to 8; and Fridays, 11 to 3.)

NEUE GALERIE

1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—"Comic Grotesque: Wit and Mockery in German Art, 1870-1940" advances the Neue's retroactive promotion of Austrian and German modern art and craft. This succinct, scholarly show is a crash course in names both big—**Böcklin**, **Kubin**, **Klinger**, **Nolde**, **Grosz**, **Feininger**, **Höch**, **Heartfield**—and little (the performer and filmmaker **Karl Valentin** is a real find) who infused Germanic avant-gardism with sometimes hilarious, always obstreperous ill temper. Did anyone in seventy years have a nice day? You will not forget a silent movie by **Valentin** (aided by **Bertolt Brecht**) in which a man accidentally decapitated by a nervous barber is repaired to fight an appointed duel—in the midst of which a girl surreptitiously lifts his head off with a fishing rod. At first terrified, the opponent comes to savor the joke. He and the girl are happy together. Through Feb. 14. (Open Fridays, 11 to 9, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM

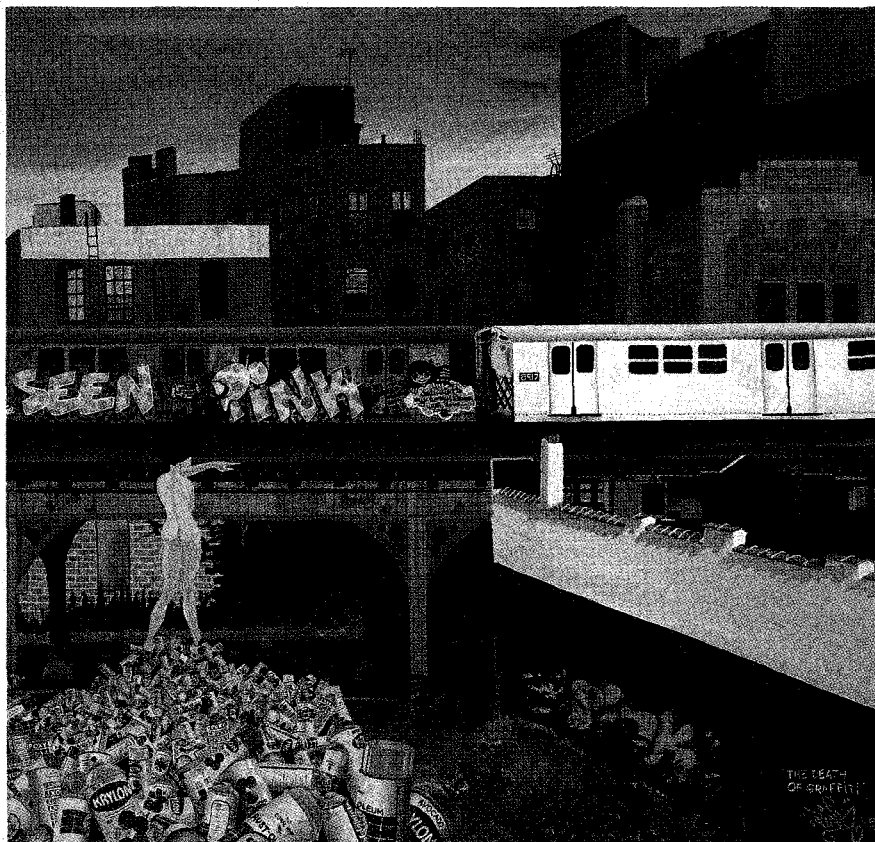
Temporarily located in the Chelsea Museum, 556 W. 22nd St. (212-219-1222)—"East Village USA." Through March 19. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—Manhattan's first museum devoted entirely to **Himalayan** art. (Open Tuesdays and Saturdays, 11 to 7; Wednesdays and Sundays, 11 to 5; and Thursdays and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—A show of **Kerry James Marshall's** recent work, "One True



I LOVE THE EIGHTIES *The New Museum's "East Village USA" revisits the East Village scene of the early and mid-eighties: neo-expressionist painting, Neo-Geo objects, punk music, graffiti, performance art, fly-by-night galleries, political rage, sexual shenanigans. The fast, frenetic sensations of Keith Haring and Kenny Scharf, Crash and Lady Pink, and David Wojnarowicz and Mike Bidlo, among dozens of others whom one critic dubbed "Puerilists," flare and fade anew. (You had to be there.) The most substantial talents—Jean-Michel Basquiat, Nan Goldin, Jeff Koons, Philip Taaffe, Karen Finley—feel a mite detached, now, from the first New York avant-garde that shrugged off global perspectives to party locally. The rest is entropy.*—Peter Schjeldahl

Thing: Meditations on Black Aesthetics augments the artist's signature canvases (which recast nineteenth-century-style history paintings with African-American figures) with sculptures, drawings, video, and installation work. "Grocery Circular" paintings substitute food specials with artists' names and auction prices, demonstrating how all worth is market related. A series of light-box sculptures bear long, convoluted names of African-American churches. The laminated medallions in "First" commemorate landmarks in African-American history, like the first birth in the U.S., the first *Vogue* cover, and the first Nobel Prize in Literature. It's a fine history lesson, but few of the objects reach the heights of his excoriating history paintings. Through Jan. 9. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

JOAN FONTCUBERTA

Diagrams, photographs, and a plastic model airplane with an accompanying DVD ponder the 2001 incident in which an American EP-3 spy plane crashed in China and was eventually returned, entirely dismantled, to the U.S. military. It's a rich sub-

ject, the public conflict between major powers over bungled covert operations, but Fontcuberta's treatment—misassembled model airplanes floating in dark, celestial fields—verges on the sterile. Through Jan. 8. (Zabriske, 41 E. 57th St. 212-752-1223.)

STUART SHILS

A collection of small (most are about twelve by thirteen inches), scumbly paintings made in 2003 and 2004 in Ireland. One might call them landscapes, except that the land and its monuments are, in every painting, obscured almost completely by mists, rains, and clouds. Thus we have titles like "Approaching Weather Obliterating Hills and Fields," "Coastline Sparkling Through Diffuse Light," and "Tinted Mist Blowing from the Sea." Shils's depiction of the scrim that strong weather lays over natural scenery has a handsome, blowy romanticism, perhaps his true subject. Through Jan. 8. (De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave. 212-262-5050.)

ALEXI WORTH

This show of five small paintings is called "Only Connect," but the reference is to punches, not E. M. Forster. Businessmen in gray suits—Worth calls them his "inner CEOs"—engage in fistfights in nondescript corporate offices. The style veers from soft-lit realism to comic-bookish graphics; the antagonists' bald pates sometimes have an air-brushed precision and sometimes look as if they had been cut out with pinkish shears. A wall of drawings and studies shows how Worth arrived at these images of conflict, in which the increasing cartoonishness of behavior and style are twinned. Through Dec. 30. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave. 212-247-2111.)

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

THOMAS ASHCRAFT / TINA GIROUARD

Two little-known artists—chosen, respectively, by Bruce Nauman and Susan Rothenberg—impress, and one delights. Ashcraft, a New Mexican bricoleur who has skirted fame by choice, shows tiny, science-y setups and thimble-theatrical tableaux, spotlight in a darkened room. The concepts are odd but precise—a proposal for artistic surgical scars, memories of a grandfather who seemed able to cure warts by, more or less, unthinking them. Ashcraft's methods are intricate but never fussy; they galvanize imagination. Giroard, a veteran of the nineteen-seventies and eighties New York avant-garde who has since lived and worked in Louisiana and Haiti, gets a pocket retrospective of decorative works in wallpaper, sequined embroidery, and linoleum, among other stuffs, that fill physical space with cool and stirring social poetry. Through Jan. 29. (Cue, 511 W. 25th St. 212-206-3583.)

ODILI DONALD ODITA

Hard-edged abstraction by a Nigerian-born painter who employs a warm palette and minimal versions of African decorative motifs. "Black on Black" looks like a geometric version of a stretched-out zebra's hide, while "Parting Water" and "Peace/Pieces" are composed of faceted shards of ochre, red, and muted blue. Their flatness is emphasized, but they're also reminiscent of African textiles. A collection of drawings are as urgently Expressionist as his paintings are formally controlled. A hooded figure, an emaciated child, a scarred face, and skulls create a frightening tableau that is cut with a slogan of hope on one charcoal pastel: "Never Give Up." Through Dec. 31. (Lynch, 531-539 W. 25th St. 212-924-3290.)

MARTHA ROSLER

Rosler is our Raoul Hausmann, John Heartfield, or Hannah Höch: a Dada-tinged artist whose work rages at contemporary geopolitics. The best-known work in the forty years of photographed collages here is the series "Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful" (1967-72), which combines Vietnam War photojournalism with cutouts from contemporary home-design magazines. The cushy prosperity of postwar America is mixed to disturbing effect with images of soldiers, corpses, and wounded Vietnamese. She's revived this strategy to fit the current conflict, with women in chadors and soldiers in desert camouflage traipsing through the elegant landscapes and interiors of the *Wallpaper* and *Architectural Digest* set. Through Jan. 8. (Gorney, Bravin, and Lee, 534 W. 26th St. 212-352-8372.)

Short List

ROZ CHAST

Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410. Through Jan. 29.

HANS-PETER FELDMANN

303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121. Through Jan. 8.

ROBERT RYMAN

Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-421-3292. Through Jan. 8.

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

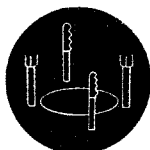
SU-MEI TSE

In the remarkable central piece here, a cellist responds to her own instrument's echo, playing with and against it like a jazz musician improvising her way through a set. The minimal, mournful sounds, recorded in a studio, are synchronized with video images of the artist, a trained classical cellist, digitally nestled in a chilly mountain setting. The only thing that detracts from "Echo" is the sound from another of her videos, projected on the opposite side of a freestanding wall. The percussive sounds of "The Desert Sweepers," in which men dressed in Parisian sanitation workers' uniforms scratch at the ground with their brooms in a computer-generated desert, diminish rather than complement the mellow tones of the cello. Through Jan. 22. (Peter Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441.)

"NONE OF THE ABOVE"

Tiny works by a stellar roster of artists are tucked in corners or under baseboards, or are just hiding in plain sight; the exhibition checklist is like the starting point for a scavenger hunt. Timothy Greenfield-Sanders contributes an Andy Warhol postage stamp. Maurizio Cattelan uses suction cups to stick a little papier-mâché portrait of the artist-curator, John Armleder, to a window. Olaf Breuning's plasticine figure "Marc" perches on a ledge near the ceiling, while Tony Matelli's brass cigarette butt lies crushed on the floor. A painting on a grain of rice and a lowly thumbtack amplify the absurdist ethos of this show, in which the gallery appears empty but is actually packed with art. Through Jan. 15. (Swiss Institute, 495 Broadway. 212-925-2035.)

TABLES FOR TWO



PURE

54 Irving Pl. (212-477-1010)—When dining at a raw-food restaurant, one may be forgiven for moments of confusion. At Pure's bar one recent evening, a man waiting for his date was enticed by a small rock holding down a neighbor's bill. "Could I get one of those?" he inquired, thinking it was a little snack. Thankfully, nothing on the menu at this upscale vegan eatery faintly resembles a mouthful of pebbles, and the waitstaff, who are attentive, knowledgeable, and glowing, are impossibly pleased to introduce diners to the joys of raw food.

The kitchen at Pure contains no meat, no dairy, no ovens, and no stoves. Nothing is heated above a hundred and eighteen degrees Fahrenheit—to preserve beneficial enzymes—and food dehydrators and processors are used to produce creative approximations of pasta, beans, and cheese. (Soft corn tortillas are filled with "beans" made from sun-dried tomatoes and sunflower seeds; the "sour cream" topping is a purée of cashews, young coconut meat, and lime juice.) Made with impeccably lush produce, the dishes turned out here are often as vibrant as the vermillion walls. In the Thai lettuce wraps, deep-green leaves are rolled around crisp, tangy cabbage and mango, while cashew "cheese" is enfolded between thin crimson slices of beets to form ravioli. Flavors are also unfailingly bright, with surprising combinations of savory and sweet, like a mushroom-and-asparagus tart with a drizzle of huckleberry sauce. But the textures are sometimes unappealing: the tart crust was dense and tough, while other entrées came out mushy. "It's like something you'd eat on a camping trip," one diner said after trying a forkful of the creamy squash pasta.

The best course at Pure is dessert, when the chefs relax the orthodoxy, cheating a bit with honey (not vegan) and maple syrup (not raw). A chocolate terrine has a streak of fudgy dark chocolate and is studded with hazelnuts, and the chocolate ganache has the addictive richness of brownie batter. Then, of course, there are the cocktails: sake whirled together with organic juices and teas, which almost seem healthy. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner and weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées \$16-\$25.)

—Andrea Thompson

Short List

RICHARD TUTTLE

The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. 212-219-2166. Through Feb. 26.

"FIELD OF COLOR:

TANTRA DRAWINGS FROM INDIA"

The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. 212-219-2166. Through Jan. 22.

"FLIPSIDE"

Artists Space, 38 Greene St. 212-226-3970. Through Jan. 8.

PHOTOGRAPHY

THOMAS ALLEN

Pop-up art ascends to sublime heights in these twenty-by-twenty-four-inch chromogenic prints of constructions made from old books. Why not view the books themselves? Because here the artist controls the lighting, perspective, and focus to create multidimensional scenes rich in detail. In "Swell," a ship with numbered sails rides the wave of the unabridged dictionary it was clipped from. In "Thirst," a femme fatale holds a glass out from her cover, to be filled by a rogue from a neighboring volume. Through Feb. 5. (Foley, 547 W. 27th St. 212-244-9081.)

ROSWELL ANGIER

Expect to be moved, not titillated, by these sixteen vintage black-and-white prints from the mid-nineteen-seventies of strippers in Boston's red-light district. The photographer, born in 1940, knew his subjects and documented them as a young man in his book "... A Kind of Life: Conversations in the Combat Zone." Angier's portraits of the denizens of such places as the Two O'Clock Club and the Mousetrap Cabaret are deeply humane, giving these objects of voyeurism a chance to look back at you. Also on view are eleven black-and-white prints, dating from 1978 to 1982, documenting the lives of Native Americans in New Mexico and Arizona. Through Jan. 29. (Gitterman, 179 E. 75th St. 212-734-0868.)

ANDERS PETERSEN

Stark and grainy black-and-white images by a Swedish photographer. A series of small prints show people in a mental institution—a Patti Smith look-alike pulls her hair, a man lies on his bed flicking ashes on the sheet. A more recent body of work, more diaristic in subject matter, is seemingly haphazardly hung, with some prints so high on the wall that they are difficult to see. These pictures recall Nan Goldin's use of family and friends, but the high-contrast images are harsher and colder, while still feeling intimate and personal. The gallery's back room is hung with prints from the sixties and seventies made in a seedy Hamburg bar; the patrons seem to be having the time of their lives even when they're about to punch each other in the face. Through Jan. 31. (Marvelli, 526 W. 26th St. 212-627-3363.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Three important photographers, Bill Owens, Ralph Eugene Meatyard, and E. J. Bellocq, provide a primer of sorts on twentieth-century American portraiture. Meatyard, an optician by trade who was from Lexington, Kentucky, died young in 1972, at the height of his powers. He took eerie, surrealistic pictures of his friends and family, often posed wearing plastic masks. This is the largest show of the photographer's work ever seen in New York, with a hundred and fifty images that span his too short career. Bellocq photographed prostitutes in their rooms around 1912 in a straightforward, respectful way. The work was forgotten until Lee Friedlander discovered Bellocq's glass negatives in a New Orleans antique shop. I.C.P. has a selection of Friedlander's prints, shown at MOMA in 1970, and recently discovered vintage prints. Bill Owens's book "Suburbia" made him an instant star when it was published in 1972. His pictures of young families in their new tract homes in Livermore, California, spoke to Western migration, consumer culture, and shifting cultural mores. These equally canny pictures, entitled "Leisure," were taken about ten years later, just before Owens quit photography and opened a microbrewery. Through Feb. 27. (1133 Sixth Ave. 212-857-0045.)

Short List

BILL BRANDT

Houk, 745 Fifth Ave. 212-750-7070. Through Jan. 8.

BEATE GÜTSCHOW

Danziger, 521 W. 26th St. 212-629-6778. Through Jan. 15.

"STAGING HAPPINESS"

Nailya Alexander, 24 W. 57th St. 212-315-2211. Through Dec. 30.



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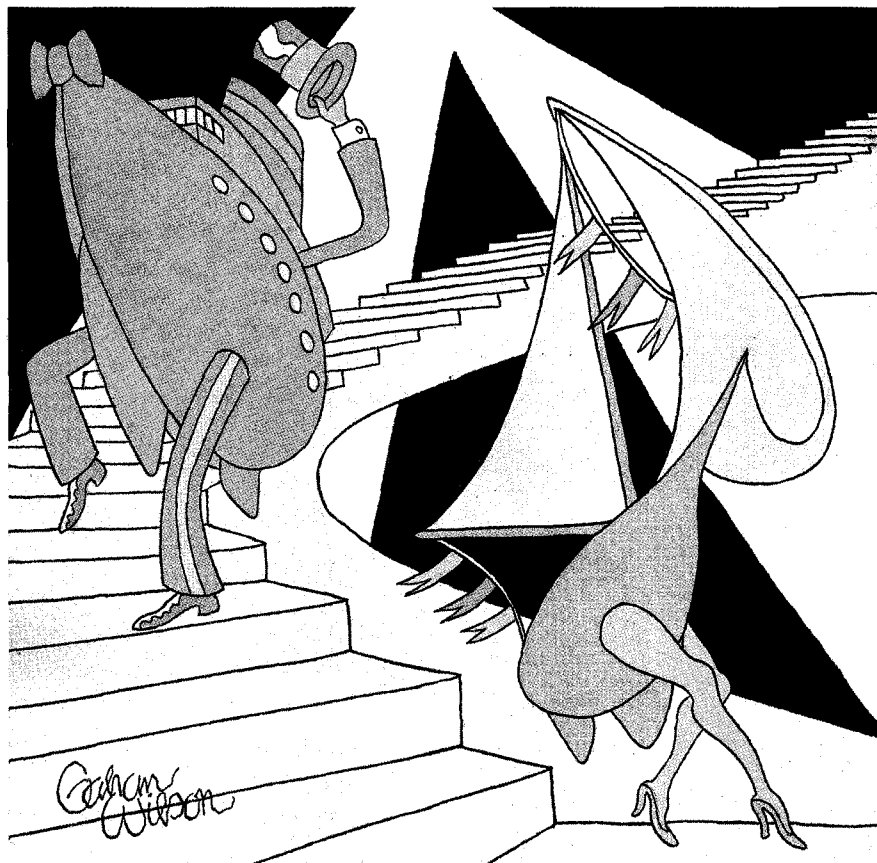
*Prices listed for Europe from NYC/BOS. China is listed from LAX/SFO. Air taxes/government fees and port charges additional.

CLASSICAL MUSIC OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

Dec. 29 and Jan. 1 at 8: Karita Mattila, the Finnish soprano who gave a stunning performance as Salome last spring, returns to do justice to a more mature but equally desperate character: the title role in "Kát'a Kabanová," the first of the great operas that Janáček produced near the end of his life. She is joined by Magdalena Kožena, Judith Forst, Jorma Silvasti (in his début), Chris Merritt, Raymond Very, and Vladimir Ognovenko; Jiri Belohlávek, one of the most admired Czech conduc-

zio Benini conducts. ♦ Jan. 1 at 1: Stephen Wadsworth's production of "Rodelinda," the first the Met has mounted, is a triumph for all concerned—not least for Handel, whose decorous world of da-capo arias and impossibly noble characters has rarely seemed more lively. Renée Fleming and David Daniels keep the trills and roulades going through to the end, with Stephanie Blythe, Bejun Mehta, Kobie van Rensburg, and John Relyea also contributing strong performances; the expert early-music conductor Harry Bicket, adding recorders, lutes, and harpsichord to the pit, lightens the Met Orchestra's sound and makes it dance. ♦ Jan. 3 at 8: The robust American soprano Andrea Gruber takes the title role in the season premiere of the Zeffirelli production of "Turandot,"



The New York National Boat Show, at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center.

tors of our time, conducts. (These are the final performances.) ♦ Dec. 30 at 8: One of the most surprising things about the Met's production of "Les Contes d'Hoffmann" is Günther Schneider-Siemssen's set: an ice-blue scrim rising to reveal a blood-orange, cavernous tavern, which itself sinks to make way for a stage replete with comically grotesque toy-land gadgetry. The cast, in contrast, is a marvel of reliable professionalism. Ramón Vargas, in the leading role, keeps his supple tenor steady under strain, while the baritone James Morris brings an aristocratic insouciance and easy timbre to each of the four villain roles. Aleksandra Kurzak steals the show with her excellent début as the robot girl Olympia: her growth from shrill, mechanical emotion to natural human warmth is a beautiful balance of artifice and authenticity. Frédéric Chaslin stitches together the comic and tragic elements of Offenbach's most challenging work with meticulously detailed conducting. ♦ Jan. 4 at 8: With Jennifer Welch-Babidge replacing Kurzak. ♦ Dec. 31 at 7:30: The Met's durable production of "Il Barbiere di Siviglia" will serve as this season's New Year's Eve gala, in which a performance given by such singers as Katarina Karnéus, Matthew Polenzani, Dwayne Croft, Carlos Chausson, and John Relyea will be interrupted during Act II by several surprise guests; Mauri-

heading a cast that also includes Krassimira Stoyanova, Johan Botha (as Calaf), and Hao Jiang Tian; Bertrand de Billy conducts. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

AMATO OPERA

If there's any opera that suits this company's intimate East Village theatre, it's "La Bohème," complete with starving artists and boisterous city scenes. Anthony Amato, as always, directs the production. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. Jan. 2 at 2:30, with a New Year's Eve gala performance on Dec. 31 at 7.)

NATIONAL CHORALE: "DIE FLEDERMAUS"

Martin Josman conducts his singers and orchestra in a semi-staged gala performance of Strauss's fizzy operetta; the cast is headed by Suzan Hanson, Valérie McCarthy, Jeffrey Reynolds, and Eric Johnston. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 31 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Mussorgsky's piano suite "Pictures at an Exhibition" never sounds more brilliant than in the renowned orchestration by Maurice Ravel, but the version by Sergei Gorchakov—which Kurt Masur

came to know during his years in East Germany—makes the piece sound Russian again. It's the capstone of Masur's all-Russian program with his old orchestra, which also includes Rachmaninoff's seductively gloomy tone poem "Isle of the Dead" and Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3 (with the quirky and virtuosic Finnish composer-pianist Olli Mustonen). (Dec. 28-30 at 7:30.) ♦ Masur and the Philharmonic end the year with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, with the assistance of the New York Choral Artists; the vocal soloists are Adrienne Pieczonka (making her Philharmonic début), Marietta Simpson, Thomas Studebaker, and Albert Dohmen (another début). (Dec. 31 at 8.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

"CHRISTO È NATO"

The Church of St. Francis of Assisi pays tribute to its patron saint with a concert of the Christmas music that his followers sang. These "Laude Francescane," along with a collection of late-medieval instrumental works, will be given by a group of more than seventy singers and players (on lutes, bagpipes, vielles, and other early instruments), including Artek, Parthenia, and the St. Francis Choir, all led by Drew Minter and Marcia Young. (135 W. 31st St. Jan. 2 at 3. A donation is suggested.)

RECITALS

MARK URANKER

The harpsichordist, in a short lunchtime concert, performs works by Frescobaldi and D'Anglebert. (Church of St. Francis of Assisi, 135 W. 31st St. Dec. 29 at 1:15. No tickets required.)

BARGEMUSIC

The violinist Olga Bloom, Bargemusic's founder, president, and kindly éminence grise, will join in an all-Bach gala for New Year's Eve. She will be joined by such musicians as the trumpeter Mark Gould, the flutist Michael Parloff, the oboist Rita Mitsel, the violinist Mark Peskanov, and the pianist Steven Beck in performances of the Second, Fourth, and Fifth Brandenburg Concertos, the Keyboard Concerto in D Minor, BWV 1052, and the Concerto in C Minor for Oboe and Violin. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. Dec. 31 at 7:30.)

SVETOSLAV STOYANOV

The dynamic young percussionist (the winner of the 2003 Concert Artists Guild competition) offers a matinee concert of music by Schwaner, Viñao, and other composers. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Jan. 4 at 2.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

THE CONEY ISLAND POLAR BEAR CLUB

The intrepid swimmers take their annual dip in the Atlantic on Jan. 1 at 1 (see This Week). New York City Transit is also running a vintage train to Coney Island that day. It leaves Columbus Circle at 9:30 A.M., makes stops in Manhattan on the D Line, and then runs along the B line in Brooklyn. (Stillwell Ave. at the boardwalk, Coney Island, Brooklyn. For more information, call 718-356-7741.)

NEW YORK NATIONAL BOAT SHOW

Those who prefer to be on the water rather than in it will enjoy looking at this collection of sailboats, power cruisers, speedboats, and runabouts. The show is celebrating its hundredth anniversary this year, and antique wooden boats from the first half of the twentieth century will also be on display. (Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, Eleventh Ave. between 34th and 39th Sts. Jan. 1-9. For more information, call 212-984-7000.)

READING

Jan. 1, starting at 2: The Poetry Project holds its annual marathon reading, with performances by more than a hundred and forty writers, musicians, dancers, and artists. This year, Eric Bogosian, Penny Arcade, Philip Glass, Taylor Mead, Jonas Mekas, Eileen Myles, and Patti Smith are expected to join the throng. (St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.)

GRAHAM WILSON

MOVIES OPENING

THE ASSASSINATION OF RICHARD NIXON

In a drama based on actual events, Sean Penn plays a salesman who attempts to murder the President. With Naomi Watts, Don Cheadle, and Jack Thompson. Directed by Niels Mueller. Opening Dec. 29. (Empire 25 and Union Square.)

IN GOOD COMPANY

A new drama from the writer-director Paul Weitz, in which a fifty-year-old advertising executive (Dennis Quaid) gets a new boss (Topher Grace) who is twenty-six and interested in his daughter (Scarlett Johansson). Opening Dec. 29.

A LOVE SONG FOR BOBBY LONG

After her mother's death, a young woman (Scarlett Johansson) returns to her childhood home in New Orleans and finds that it's inhabited by a failed English professor (John Travolta) and his protégé (Gabriel Macht). Directed by Shainee Gabel. Opening Dec. 29.

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 29. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and 19th Street East 6.)

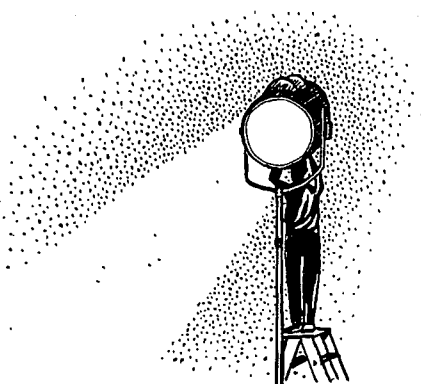
FILM NOTES

ALEXANDER

Beware the long-cherished project. That is one of the lessons handed down by Oliver Stone's bio-pic of Alexander the Great, upon which the director has ruminated for many years. Somebody less obsessed by the undertaking might have given us less to laugh about; as things stand, we gaze at Colin Farrell, in the leading role, and wonder if Alexander was impelled to reach the limits of the known world purely in order to forget the tragedy of his wig. Farrell looks deeply grieved in his part, as does Jared Leto, who has the unhappy task of portraying Hephaestion, the general's abiding lover. The story, narrated by the aged Ptolemy (Anthony Hopkins) and unfolding in flashback, takes us from a princely boyhood in Macedonia, under the raging rule of Val Kilmer, to the rout of Darius at Gaugamela in 331 B.C. (clearly the heart of the picture, with a wild beat), and so on, eastward, all the way to an elephant-infested India. Many viewers will find nearly three hours of plotless history, alternately savage and sluggish, a little hard to stomach, and they will turn with relief to those performers who treat the whole enterprise as the highest form of kitsch—Angelina Jolie, as Alexander's mother, and Rosario Dawson, as his wife. When these two are onscreen, all thoughts of Homeric heroism are flung aside, and we can settle down to enjoy the movie for what it is: the "Show-girls" of the ancient world.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/6/04.) (Battery Park 11, Cinema 1, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.)

THE AVIATOR

The billionaire madman, the taloned hermit of Las Vegas eating nothing but steak and peas—that was the haggard face in the tabloids that millions of us knew in the years before Howard Hughes's death, in 1976. Martin Scorsese's brilliantly entertaining movie goes back to the period when Hughes (Leonardo DiCaprio) was an exhilaratingly handsome and daring young man. The narrative, concocted by the screenwriter John Logan, is not meant to be taken literally. It's a fantasia about a studly capitalist prince who produces and directs movies, designs and flies airplanes, and sleeps with dozens of beautiful actresses and starlets. Scorsese and the designer Dante Ferretti press the young tycoon into the svelte Art Deco design of the period; in his tuxedos and casual beige flying duds, Hughes becomes the pictorial embodiment of restless bravado. Toward the end, there are glimpses of the geriatric paranoid that Hughes would become, but the movie is consistently lighthearted and engaging, a sort of pop "Citizen Kane." With Cate Blanchett



doing a nervy imitation of Katharine Hepburn, Alec Baldwin as Hughes's rival, and Alan Alda as the corrupt Maine senator Owen Brewster.—*David Denby* (12/20 & 27/04) (Cinema 1, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

BAD EDUCATION

In an obscure parochial school in rural Spain, two young boys, Ignacio and Enrique, fell in love. But the boys were only eleven, and the affair was broken up by a priest and schoolmaster named Manolo. The priest, however, wasn't simply enforcing the rules. Father Manolo had already laid hands on Ignacio, and he wanted him entirely for himself. Pedro Almodóvar's extraordinary new drama, which is both a summary of his career and a deepening of his recent style, opens sixteen years after the affair, in 1980. Ignacio (Gael García Bernal), now a young actor, brings a manuscript to Enrique (Fele Martínez), who has become a well-known film director in Madrid. The manuscript chronicles the boys' friendship and what happened to Ignacio—he became a drag queen and a blackmailer. We see the story enacted; later, Enrique turns it into a movie, and we see that being filmed, too, at which point the priest, now an ex-priest, shows up, and we hear his version of the events. The truth of what happened to the grownup Ignacio and Enrique emerges in pieces: the three narratives, as they expand and correct one another, become a trio of mirrors producing endless off-angle reflections. The movie asks: Is love possible between men, or is it possible only between innocent boys? In Spanish.—*D.D.* (11/22/04) (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

BEYOND THE SEA

Kevin Spacey's wide-screen cinematic treatment of the fifties pop idol Bobby Darin is an exuberant but convoluted love letter. Taking his cues from Bob Fosse's "All That Jazz," Spacey creates a musical biography that's part fantasy (in the singing sequences) and part reality, but the movie never really jells. There's no getting around the fact that Spacey, at forty-five, can't play a baby-faced pop star, and the scenes of Darin's early years with his wife Sandra Dee (a pouty Kate Bosworth) don't come off. Still, there's a real razzle-dazzle to the movie, and the musical numbers, which are sung by Spacey himself, have been brilliantly arranged by John Wilson.—*Bruce Diones* (Angelika Film Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and 19th Street East 6.)

CLOSER

Patrick Marber has adapted his own hit play, of the same name, and given the lucky director, Mike Nichols, a script that he can chew on. Some viewers, or listeners, may flinch at the profanity here, or at the level of honesty that demands such profane expression, but peel away the carnal talk and what you are left with—the bone structure of the piece—is not so different from that of Noël Coward's "Private Lives." We get two interlocking couples: Dan (Jude Law), a writer who falls in love with Alice (Natalie Portman), a night-club stripper, and Larry (Clive Owen), a doctor who marries a photographer called Anna (Julia Roberts). The transactions are quick and brutal: Dan has anonymous online sex with Larry and a yearlong affair with Anna, Alice leaves Dan and finds work at a club, Larry finds her there and tells her precisely what he wants, and nobody is happy. The film is more civilized than the play, the

acid slightly diluted, yet Law, for one, looks eaten away by the bitter pace of it all. Roberts, too, is haunted and pained, whereas Portman and Owen drink and spit their lines with undiminished relish, often at speeds that Nichols can barely handle. Not recommended for couples on a first date.—*A.L.* (12/13/04) (Battery Park 11, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

HOTEL RWANDA

Paul Rusesabagina (Don Cheadle), the Rwandan manager of the four-star Hôtel des Mille Collines, in Kigali, wears a blue suit and tie and is very polite, even deferential, toward everyone. Paul works for the Belgian company that owns the hotel, which has become an oasis for Europeans and for African élites. When the Hutu massacres of the Tutsi minority begin, in the spring of 1994, Paul keeps the Mille Collines running. He also, on the sly, establishes it as a haven for both Hutu and Tutsi fugitives, keeping them momentarily safe from the machete-wielding militia, who kill eight hundred thousand people in a few months. Working in Rwanda and South Africa, the writer-director, Terry George, convincingly stages the horrors outside the hotel: the paralyzing fear in the night, the vilely inciting radio broadcasts, the chaos and arbitrary madness of the slaughter. But the true drama of "Hotel Rwanda" lies in the character of Paul, who is betrayed by the Europeans who formed him but who holds to his belief in civility, right through the worst disasters. The movie is a triumph for Cheadle—he never steps outside the character for emotional grandstanding or easy moralism.—*D.D.* (12/20 & 27/04) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

HOUSE OF FLYING DAGGERS

Not a sequel to "Hero," the fantastical hit of the summer, but a chance for the same director, Zhang Yimou, to paint the screen red with his luscious and newly invigorated style. In the middle of the ninth century, two regional policemen (Andy Lau and Takeshi Kaneshiro) take on the might of the Flying Daggers, a furtive antigovernment organization. Their first break is to arrest Mei (Ziyi Zhang), a blind dancer who has all sorts of tricks up her sleeves, most of them liable to cut your throat. One cop goes undercover, hoping that Mei can be seduced into revealing the villains' lair. There is an unembarrassed scent of melodrama to all this, as if Zhang's plot had been infected by the excess of his violent ballets—the knives, arrows, kicks, and leaps with which every contest is resolved, and by which the characters demonstrate their respect for one another and their scorn for the laws of physics. At some point, though, the poise falters, and the movie, unlike "Hero," tips into silliness; in the lust to register nothing but beautiful patterns of movement, the claims of logic, political fear, and even love are blithely blown away. In Mandarin.—*A.L.* (12/13/04) (Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 72nd Street East, and Union Square.)

ITALIANAMERICAN

In this spare, joyous, tender documentary from 1974, Martin Scorsese, fresh from shooting "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore," sits down in his parents' Lower East Side apartment and talks to them about their family and neighborhood history. What results is a portrait of a marriage, steeped in clan and ethnic heritage, that amounts to a mini-"Roots" for urban Americans of Sicilian stock. Charles and Catherine Scorsese have a relationship that's comfortable even when it's uncomfortable—as when Charles starts to discuss Irish resentment toward Italians and Catherine retreats to finish her meat sauce in the kitchen. The movie is about people who happily measure the American Dream in generational increments.—*Michael Sragow* (Museum of Modern Art; Dec. 29.)

KINSEY

Liam Neeson, his hair standing straight up like tensed wire, is the dauntless but neurotic sex researcher Alfred C. Kinsey in this vivacious and witty—even naughty—bio-pic, written and directed by Bill Condon. The movie covers Kinsey's entire adult life (with flashbacks to his boyhood), including his marriage to Clara McMillen (Laura Linney) and his relations with the much younger men—Clyde

Martin (Peter Sarsgaard), Wardell Pomeroy (Chris O'Donnell), and Paul Gebhardt (Timothy Hutton)—who became, at Indiana University in the forties and fifties, the principal assistants on Kinsey's revolutionary books about male and female sexuality. At the movie's heart is a clever sequence devoted to the team's interviewing technique, a method of nonjudgmental inquiry that causes hundreds of thousands of subjects to open up and confess, with the result that behavior that had been isolated in the past as "deviant" or "perverted" came to seem like relatively common occurrences on the spectrum of human sexuality. Eager to sympathize and understand everyone, Kinsey the liberator plunges into

but Comrade Soderbergh abuses the privilege." This mock caper movie jerks along in the same incoherent style as Steven Soderbergh's 2002 "Full Frontal," which was a mock art movie. Soderbergh and the producer Jerry Weintraub jammed a script by George Nolfi called "Honor Among Thieves" into the "Ocean's Eleven" formula, and the result is a sequel devoted to an insultingly silly premise: Andy Garcia, the Vegas casino owner whom the team ripped off in the first movie, wants his money back, so the boys have to steal other people's money in order to repay him; they then get into a competition with the greatest thief in Europe to lift a Fabergé egg from a Roman museum. Much narrative repe-

RAY
Swaying from side to side, his back arched almost to the point of snapping, Jamie Foxx, as Ray Charles, seems pulled upward to the heavens and downward to the keys at the same time. This intelligent and tough-minded bio-pic, written by James L. White and Taylor Hackford and directed by Hackford, tells us a lot about Charles, but it doesn't tell us everything. Though properly awed by Charles's talent, "Ray" refuses to get chummy or possessive. The movie picks up Charles's story in the late forties, when he's an ambitious but wary teen-age musician, and carries him through his musical innovations and his personal pleasures and



Al Pacino and Jeremy Irons in Michael Radford's adaptation of "The Merchant of Venice," opening December 29.

gay bars, homosexual relationships, and once-a-philosopher-twice-a-pervert masochistic practices. Condon presents him as a genuine hero who drove himself into semi-madness and exhaustion, a sacrificial figure who died for our pleasure.—D.D. (11/29/04) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

MILLION DOLLAR BABY

Much of Clint Eastwood's evocative and poetic boxing movie is set in the Hit Pit, a moldy, sweat-stained downtown Los Angeles gym in which crusty veterans train a few serious fighters and many hapless punks. Scrap (Morgan Freeman), an ex-fighter with one functioning eye, works at the gym and exchanges affectionately nasty remarks with the owner, one Frankie Dunn (Eastwood). Against his better judgment, Frankie agrees to take on a tough country woman, Maggie Fitzgerald (Hilary Swank), who, not entirely to our surprise, rapidly becomes the hottest fighter in the sordid but lucrative world of women's boxing. The story, adapted by Paul Haggis from F. X. Toole's collection, "Rope Burns," is borderline trite, but the movie has the sweet melancholy of a great jazz piece.—D.D. (12/20 & 27/04) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

THE MIRACLE OF MORGAN'S CREEK

It's wartime, and Betty Hutton is the overenthusiastic girl who dates a soldier and produces sextuplets. This is one of Preston Sturges's surreal-slapstick-satire-conniption-fit comedies, and part of our great crude heritage. The picture was held up for a year because of censorship problems, and you'll know why. Released in 1944.—Pauline Kael (Moving Image; Jan. 2.)

OCEAN'S TWELVE

Let us (why not?) borrow a trope from Leon Trotsky: "Every man has a right to be stupid on occasion,

and dishevelment follow, underlined by inept "spontaneous" camera work. The actors run numbers on each other's heads and hang out at George Clooney's actual villa on Lake Como; Bruce Willis shows up, trying to pretend he's in on the joke, and smirks his way through several awkward scenes. Soderbergh and the rest may be embarrassed by the artificiality of caper movies, but their way of expressing their uneasiness frustrates the audience's desire to enter into a harmless fantasy. In the end, everyone in the movie has fun except the people watching it. With the French star Vincent Cassell, who, evading some laser beams, does a cross between gymnastics and Tai Chi Chuan, and, in general, performs with professional skill.—D.D. (Battery Park 11, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 11, Chelsea West, Cinema 1, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

PLAYTIME

Masterly and wearying. Jacques Tati conjures a comic architecture out of everything from Parisian traffic patterns and street lights to space-age airports, showrooms, and office buildings. But he doesn't fill it with anything hilarious until his characters pile into a tony supper club whose grand opening and actual completion are running on slightly different schedules. Film students and aspiring directors are the best audience for this farce—Tati is nonpareil when it comes to using the wide screen for ticklish compositional effects. Released in 1967. In French, English, and German.—M.S. (Walter Reade Theatre; Dec. 29-Jan. 4.)

torments until 1964, when he's a world-famous artist and a miserable heroin addict. There's something both joyous and demonic about this guy, an insatiable energy in his insistence on driving soul and country sounds into the beats of R. & B. For many older people in the audience, the sound of Ray Charles's music is inseparable from memories of dating, dancing, lovemaking, and loss. The movie has the bold good grace to honor the enraptured kids they once were and the sterner but still hungry grownups they became.—D.D. (11/8/04) (Battery Park 11, Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE SEA INSIDE

The director Alejandro Amenábar's follow-up to his big American hit ("The Others") is a Spanish-language film—the true-life story of Ramón Sampedro, a quadriplegic who led a campaign in favor of his right to die. As Sampedro, Javier Bardem gives a small miracle of a performance. Confined to his bed, unable to move, Bardem has an uncanny ability to express mystery and resilience. The movie centers on Sampedro's loving family and the two women who try to change his life (one supports his euthanasia, the other doesn't). The dialogue is, at times, poetic, and there's a moving, somnambulant feel to the film—it slowly drifts asleep.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Sunshine Cinema.)

SIDEWAYS

Paul Giamatti has no chin to speak of, a round-shouldered physique, and the nervous smile of a craven dog. He's the anti-ideal of the American male, and he's making a brilliant career of it. In this wonderful movie by the team of Alexander Payne (writer-director) and Jim Taylor (co-writer), Gia-

TOWER HANUKA

matti plays Miles, a failed novelist around forty who takes off for a wine-tasting tour with his buddy Jack (Thomas Haden Church), a washed-up TV actor who is about to get married. What starts as a last fling at freedom becomes for the two men—but centrally for Miles—a confrontation with middle age and stasis. Miles is a bibliophile, a cinephile, and an oenophile. Jack, however, couldn't care less—in every way, he's blissfully indiscriminating. On the road, the men meet Maya (Virginia Madsen), a divorced graduate student who works as a waitress, and Stephanie (Sandra Oh), a sexy "pour girl." The music and the camera setups are at times pedestrian, but the rest of "Sideways" is vivid and bitterly funny.—*D.D.* (10/25/04) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS

Ben Hecht wrote and Otto Preminger directed this trim film noir—one of those ninety-five-minute wonders that whisk an audience through a couple of twisty homicides and leave a whiff of melancholy in their wake. A violent New York City cop (Dana Andrews) wants to clear an innocent suspect of murder and accidentally kills him. Then he falls in love with the suspect's widow (Gene Tierney). The way Andrews mingles sadism and sadness gives the movie pungency, and Tierney is a tender woman of destiny. Released in 1950.—*M.S.* (Museum of Modern Art; Dec. 31.)

ALSO PLAYING

FINDING NEVERLAND

Battery Park 11, Cinema 1, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.

THE INCREDIBLES (11/15/04)

Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

LEMONY SNICKET'S A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS

Battery Park 11, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.

THE LIFE AQUATIC WITH STEVE ZISSOU

Lincoln Square.

MEET THE FOCKERS

42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.

SPANGLISH

Battery Park 11, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

A VERY LONG ENGAGEMENT

Paris and Sunshine Cinema.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 11, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.

Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).

Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.

19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.

Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.

Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).

Pioneer Theatre, 155 E. 3rd St. (212-254-3300).

Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.

72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.

64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.

62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.

Sunshine Cinema, 143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182).

Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.

34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.

Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.

Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.

Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.

Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Jan. 2: Preston Sturges films. Jan. 1 at 2: "The Lady Eve" (1941). ♦ Jan. 1 at 4: "Hail the Conquering Hero" (1944). ♦ Jan. 2 at 2: "The Miracle of Morgan's Creek" (†). ♦ Jan. 2 at 4: "Unfaithfully Yours" (1948). ♦ Repertory nights. Jan. 1-2 at 6:30: "La Dolce Vita" (1960, Federico Fellini; in Italian).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Dec. 29-Jan. 4 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Donkey Skin" (1970, Jacques Demy; in French).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL

55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—A Claire Denis retrospective. Jan. 4 at 12:30 and 6:30: "Chocolat" (1988; in French). ♦ Jan. 4 at 3:30 and 9: "Man No Run" (1989; in French).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

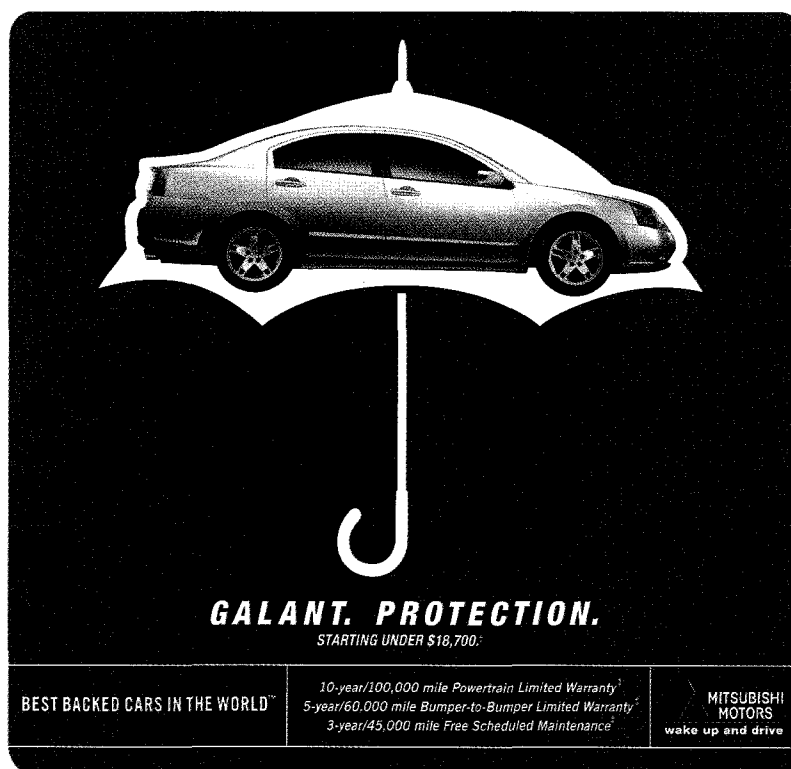
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Through Jan. 31: "Premières," new films and recent restorations. Dec. 29 at 5: "ItalianAmerican" (†). ♦ Dec. 29 at 8:30: "The Next Generation," shorts by German film students. ♦ Dec. 30 at 5: "The Diary of a Chambermaid" (1946, Jean Renoir; in French). ♦ Dec. 30 at 6: "The St. Petersburg Diary, Kozintsev's Flat" (1998, Alexander Sokurov; in Russian). ♦ Dec. 30 at 8:30: "Rêve de Cheval" (2004, Ariane Michel) and four other shorts. ♦ Dec. 31 at 5:30: "Where the Sidewalk Ends" (†). ♦ Jan. 1 at 7:30: "The Chorus" (2004, Christophe Barratier; in French). ♦ Jan. 1 at 8: "L'Avventura" (1960, Michelangelo Antonioni; in Italian). ♦ Jan. 2 at 5: "The Dark Mirror" (1946, Robert Siodmak). ♦ Jan. 2 at 5: "A Sjtetl That Doesn't Exist Anymore" (2004, Heddy Honigmann). ♦ Jan. 3 at 8: "Sissy Boy Slap Party" (2004, Guy Maddin) and five other shorts. ♦ Through Dec. 31, 2005: "112 Years of Cinema," a film from each year of moving-image history. Dec. 29 at 7: "Bird" (1988, Clint Eastwood). ♦ Dec. 30 at 8:30: "Looking for Richard" (1996, Al Pacino). ♦ Dec. 31 at 5: "Adorable" (1933, William Dieterle). ♦ Jan. 1 at 2 and Jan. 3 at 8:15: "Bringing Up Baby" (1938, Howard Hawks). ♦ Jan. 1 at 5: "White Heat" (1949, Raoul Walsh).

SUNSHINE CINEMA

143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—Midnight movies. Jan. 1: "The Muppets Take Manhattan" (1984, Frank Oz).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Special screening. Dec. 29 at 6:15 and 8:45; Dec. 30-31 at 1, 3:30, 6:15, and 8:45; Jan. 1 at 1:30, 4, 6:30, and 9; and Jan. 2-4 at 1, 3:30, 6:15, and 8:45: "Playtime" (†).



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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT GETTING WARMER



Halfway through Michael Crichton's new thriller, "State of Fear," the hero, John Kenner, finds himself trapped with a comely blonde, dodging bolts of artificial lightning. Fortunately, Kenner, an agent for the government's National Security Intelligence Agency, has the presence of mind to advise the blonde to strip down to her underwear, and, as a result, the two survive long enough to save the world from a diabolical plot. Environmentalists are conspiring to blow off a piece of Antarctica's Ross Ice Shelf, swamp California with a tidal wave, and engineer flash floods in the American Southwest (this is where the artificial lightning comes in), all by way of convincing the public that global warming is an actual danger, when, as Kenner knows, the whole thing is really just a shrug.

"Remember African killer bees?" Kenner asks at one point. "There was talk of them for years. They're here now, and apparently there's no problem."

If you judge disasters by the art they inspire, then global warming is shaping up to be a pretty big disappointment: instead of "Dr. Strangelove" and "On the Beach," we've got "Waterworld" and "The Day After Tomorrow." And although, technically speaking, Crichton's

new book isn't about the threat of global warming—it's about the threat of believing in the threat of global warming—it still manages to go awry in predictable ways. A good deal of the novel is given over to temperature graphs and to monologues on subjects like the Pleistocene ice ages. It concludes with an "author's message," two appendices, and a twenty-page bibliography. Blondes with lightning burns aside, "State of Fear" wants, weirdly enough, to be taken seriously.

As it happens, the book's release coincides with genuinely significant events in the realm of climate policy. When the Kyoto Protocol was drawn up, in 1997, it included a complex ratification mechanism: to take effect, the treaty would

have to be approved by at least fifty-five nations, and that number would have to include countries accounting for at least fifty-five per cent of the industrialized world's carbon-dioxide emissions. With Russia's ratification of Kyoto, this past November, those conditions were finally met. We are now in a ninety-day "count-down" period, and on February 16th the protocol will become binding on the hundred and thirty-two nations that have signed on to it.

Kyoto represents a small but critical step forward. It is the first global agreement to set numerical targets for emissions reductions. (These targets apply only to so-called Annex 1, or industrialized, nations.) It is also supposed to establish a global market for trading emissions credits, and to create incentives for industrialized countries to invest in clean-energy technology for the developing world. Although no one would claim that Kyoto will, all on its own, alter the fate of the planet, the treaty provides a framework for addressing the problem and, perhaps most important of all, acknowledges that there is one.

Kyoto's ratification didn't take place merely without the United States but in defiance of it. Though the Clinton Administration helped draft the protocol, it never put the agreement before the Senate. (Senate leaders had made clear that the treaty would be rejected.) Then, shortly after taking office, President Bush announced that the United States would no longer even participate in the ongoing negotiations. At this



point, America is one of only two major industrialized nations declining to abide by Kyoto. (The other is Australia.) The Administration's climate negotiator, or non-negotiator, Harlan Watson, arriving in Buenos Aires a few weeks ago for a round of international talks, defended the President's position, saying that the protocol was "not based on science."

The United States sponsored most of the original studies that brought global warming to the world's attention, back in the nineteen-seventies, and it is still the leading contributor to climate research. Its refusal to heed its own—or anyone else's—findings would seem to represent an obvious subject for a conspiracy-addled novelist. Crichton, nonetheless, has chosen the opposite tack. In "State of Fear," it is money-hungry environmentalists whose illicit schemes are always being caught on tape. (As one environmentalist says to another, explaining the need for faked lightning and tidal waves, "Species extinction from global warming—nobody gives a shit.") Meanwhile, the scientists who could reveal the truth are all co-conspirators; they suppress results that don't support alarmist conclusions because they, too, are part of the "politico-legal-media complex," or "P.L.M." The P.L.M. wants to control free-thinking Americans by keeping them in a perpetual "state of fear." The whole scenario is outlandish even by Crichtonian standards, but, when you think about it, there really isn't much choice. What "State of Fear" demonstrates is how hard it is to construct a narrative that would actually justify current American policy. In this way, albeit unintentionally, Crichton has written a book that deserves to be taken seriously.

—Elizabeth Kolbert

SHOE LEATHER WALK ON



Last summer, Caleb Smith, a thirty-four-year-old librarian at Columbia, came across an old *Times* story with the headline "NAVY OFFICER NEAR THE END OF 4-YEAR PROJECT OF WALKING

IN EVERY STREET ON MANHATTAN." The article, from December, 1954, was about an eccentric sixty-five-year-old named Thomas J. Keane, who, in the course of taking carefully planned weekend strolls, had managed to traverse some three thousand blocks and five hundred miles of Manhattan terrain. Smith, himself an inveterate walker, was then a little more than two years into his own all-encompassing Manhattan project—and, he estimated, about three-quarters of the way done. Why not pick up the pace and aim at finishing on the fiftieth anniversary of his predecessor's achievement?

That was two Sundays ago, and Smith, to commemorate the occasion, invited a handful of friends to watch him walk his last untravelled block—Thirty-third Street between Fifth Avenue and Broadway, at the foot of the Empire State Building. His final stats: thirty-one months, four pairs of shoes, one ex-girlfriend, and one aborted mugging, all culminating in a last, leisurely stride and a pervasive (if unspoken) feeling of "What next?"

You might ask: had Smith, in all his wandering, really never walked past the Empire State Building before? Task-oriented walking, it turns out, is distinct from destination-oriented walking or dog walking—all walking, in fact, that has an alternative purpose. In Smith's grand design, a block remained technically unwalked until he colored it black on his laminated map (Hagstrom, pre-digital edition). Being officially "on the walk" required him to be alone, in possession of a notebook, a camera, and a Sharpie. He instituted the solo rule early, after a frustrating experience spent crossing the West Village with a friend. "I kept saying, 'No, we have to go down this *other* street,'" he recalled the other day. "And she got impatient."

A few days before he crossed the finish line, Smith made an exception to this rule and allowed a reporter to tag along as he sought out some last, elusive stretches of road up near Inwood: a cul-de-sac off 186th Street called Washington Terrace; the perimeter of Bennett Park, where Fort Washington once lay; Colonel Robert Magaw Place, between 181st and 183rd.

"Obviously, there's some sort of psychological thing going on that I don't

quite understand," he said, emerging from a Dunkin' Donuts on 181st Street with a cup of hot coffee—essential, in cold weather, for maintaining the manual dexterity necessary to record his route. Before beginning this project, he explained, he had walked the length of Broadway—the full length of Broadway, from Yonkers to the Battery—and snapped a photograph at every block along the way. ("The pictures were kind of boring.") He had also once done Staten Island, top to bottom. ("It's a lot bigger than you think.")

As he walked west toward the George Washington Bridge, Smith began recapping his excursions. Harlem had the best architecture, while Washington Heights, where he had been forced to dodge errant baseballs and spurting fire hydrants, had the best street life. Downtown had been less satisfying. "Greenwich Village and the Financial District were almost a total loss, because you're looking at the map the whole time," he said. "I'm clearly going to have to go back and do them again."

Smith, who is from Albuquerque and moved to New York in 2000, loves what he calls the "rock-star sites," such as the Statue of Liberty and Times Square, but he is most passionate about the less heralded landmarks and oddities of the city: coal chutes and watchtowers and rock formations. Approaching Bennett Park from Pinehurst Avenue, he stopped and pointed at an outcropping of Manhattan schist. "This is the highest spot in Manhattan," he said, beaming. Then he retrieved his map from a beat-up manila folder and made a minuscule mark with his Sharpie: another one down.

The two questions Smith is most frequently asked, he said, are "Why?" and "So are you going to do Brooklyn next?" He doesn't answer the first ("If you're an urban explorer, it's pretty obvious"), and no, he isn't doing Brooklyn. If you must know, he is contemplating Central Park—those countless paths and walkways. In the meantime, he is recording his adventures and discoveries on his Web site, NewYorkCityWalk.com. He might, for instance, post his observation that the island's cuisine falls into two categories: Chinese Mexican, or Asian-owned restaurants that serve tacos, which can be found below Ninety-sixth Street;

and Mexican Chinese, or Hispanic-owned restaurants serving fried rice, which are more prevalent above Ninety-sixth. He prefers the former.

Before completing the project, Smith made a final, ceremonial exception to the rules, and, as though passing the torch, arranged to walk the streets of upper Inwood with an apprentice, Mike Epstein. Epstein, who runs the photo blog Satan's Laundromat, has so far logged just two dozen miles, but he has plans for one-upmanship. He intends to do Roosevelt Island.

—Ben McGrath

BAH HUMBUG DEPT. PLUCK YOU



A couple of weeks ago—on a real Christmas-miracle kind of day, cold and heartless in every other respect—the city's two most famous homeless guys both caught a break. First, of course, there was Pale Male, the celebrity hawk and victim of the hour, who had been rendered nestless six days earlier, when the co-op board of 927 Fifth Avenue semi-surreptitiously dismantled the rampart of sticks that he and various mates had called home since 1993. Hounded and shamed by the usual coalition of bird-lovers and co-op haters, besieged by hawk chic, the building agreed to take Pale Male back. Crisis, if not revolution, averted.

Then, there was Al Goldstein. Goldstein, as every schoolboy knows, founded the magazine *Screw* and served as the foulmouthed host of the scruffy public-access pornography program "Midnight Blue." In recent years, he has come down in the world. His company went bankrupt, and he lost everything, including a mansion in Florida and a six-story town house on East Sixty-first Street; he did time at Rikers for harassing a former employee (he published her name and number in *Screw*, along with some indelicate collages, and urged readers to call her), then got three years' probation for doing the same, more or less, to his third wife. A shoplifting bust, diabetes, depression, a wife (his fifth) afflicted with Crohn's

disease, a son who won't talk to him (and vice versa), and, finally, in recent months, full-bore homelessness—three weeks at the Bellevue men's shelter, a few nights in Central Park, then reassignment to a shelter in East Harlem. "This homeless thing is so bad," he said the other day. "It's just dirty and humiliating."

Goldstein's predicament did not in-



Al Goldstein

spire angry throngs to take to the streets, as they had for Pale Male. There was perhaps a feeling toward him, as apparently there must be toward all homeless human beings, that he had brought this on himself. Still, some people stood by him. One of them was a lawyer, Charles DeStefano, who, on the same day that the hawk won his reprieve, informed Goldstein that he'd found a place for him—no 927 Fifth, to be sure, but a home all the same. Neither man would say which borough (except that it's not Manhattan), because the new landlord doesn't know that the Al Goldstein who's renting the apartment is *the* Al Goldstein. Another friend, the magician Penn Jillette, who is to Goldstein what Mary Tyler Moore is to Pale Male, had offered to pick up his rent.

That afternoon, Goldstein was at work, a new job cold-calling businesses on behalf of New York City Bagel, a deli and caterer. So far, he had made headway with five customers, among them *The New York Review of Books* and

National Review. "I'm following my own interests," he said. "Beginning tomorrow, I'm going to call shrinks." He was set up at a table in the corner of the shop, with a phone, a script for the sales pitch, and some cigars in a Ziploc bag. He was dressed in a green fleece pullover and parachute pants, with a big Star of David pendant hanging from his neck. He is sixty-eight and newly thin, having lost a hundred and seventy pounds, as a result of gastric bypass surgery. "My life is a travesty," he said.

Goldstein, who used to have twenty-two televisions (and ninety-one clocks), now gets his information from a pair of radio earphones, which he tunes to TV news. He, for one, was sick of hearing about Pale Male. "Enough with the sensitivity," Goldstein said. "The hawk was thrown out. New York rents have gone crazy over the last few years. If the hawk can't cut it, if it can't carry its own weight, cook the damn thing." He went on, "I would like everyone to have the courage of their convictions and have recipes for hawk. All this nonsense. New Yorkers are hated, because we're so sensitive. There are thousands of homeless people around, sleeping in hallways, and nobody cares. But one hawk living on Fifth Avenue gets all the publicity."

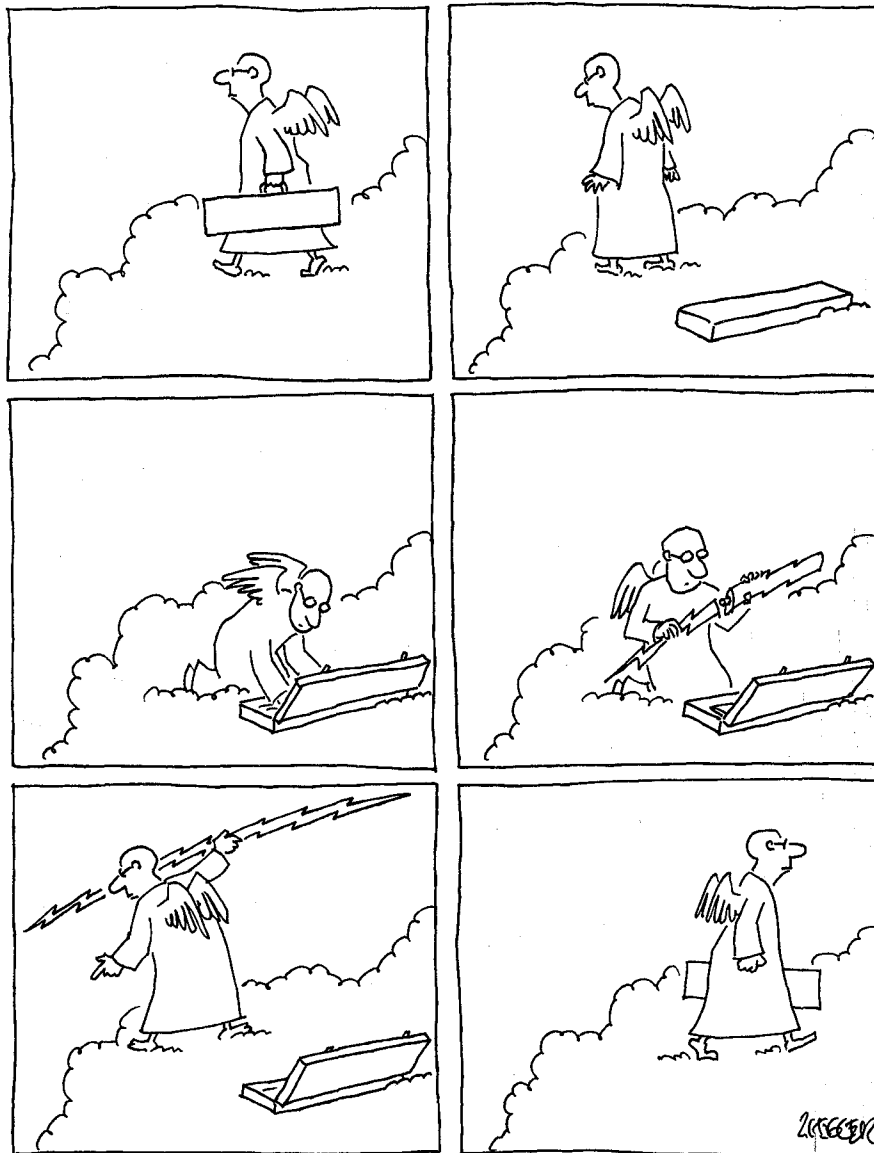
He offered advice to Pale Male, from one homeless New York icon to another: "Defecate on the tenants as they walk into the building. Defecate on the doorman. And play around—don't get locked into a female hawk thing. You're going to lose your nest anyway."

—Nick Paumgarten

SMALL WORLD DEPT. CHEERS



It's lucky that dolls can sit still longer than human beings. If a doll bellies up to a bar and orders a beer, she'll have to wait while the bartender puts three drops of resin into a miniature stein, adds a dot of yellow dye and three drops of hardener, and then stirs the mixture sixty times with a toothpick. If the doll wants a convincing head of foam on the glass,



it's easy enough for the bartender to make one—all he has to do is flick a little spackling compound on top—but, unless the beer has already hardened for a day, the foam will sink to the bottom of the glass.

There were no actual dolls at the miniature Bar Scene workshop that took place recently in the SoHo suite of the Marriott Marquis hotel, just thirteen amateur miniaturists and their teacher, Barbara Fales. Fales, who lives in Florida and teaches workshops at miniature conventions around the country, is known as a pioneer of miniature-cocktail making. She makes doll-house food as well. "People say I make the best apples they've ever seen," she said. For this workshop, she had brought along acrylic strawber-

ries, cherries, and olives, all packed in the kind of plastic capsules that are generally used for cold medication. Each strawberry was the size of a mouse's eye. The ice for the drinks was the size of pretzel salt, and a cautious taste revealed that it *was* salt. (You can also make doll's ice from the packets of silicone crystals that you find in shoeboxes.) The drink straws were so tiny that if they fell into your purse—which happened to one student—you would never see them again.

Making a miniature drink basically consists of mixing tiny quantities of two-part epoxy with the appropriate coloring. A doll's Tom Collins needs a drop of pearl or it will look too much like plain water; a doll's Pinot Noir needs a

pinhead-size fleck of black added to the red or it will look too much like Hawaiian Punch. It's a finicky process that rewards fine motor skills and a fretful, obsessive attention to detail, and—as is frequently the case with miniature workshops—all the students were female. (One was attending at the behest of her boyfriend, who is building a miniature V.I.P. lounge but speaks no English.) As is also frequently the case, the men in the miniaturists' lives understand nothing about what's important.

"When I finished the roof on my doll house, my husband told me it would leak," one woman said. Another woman looked up in amazement. "My boyfriend said the same thing!" she said. "He said, 'You didn't put on any flashing.' I told him, 'Honey, it's not like this is going to be out in the yard.'"

The miniaturists' career talk would perhaps also have been confusing to males.

"What do you do?" one asked another.

"Well, right now I'm making a half-inch-scale library with—"

"No, I mean what do you do in real size?"

Conversation was sporadic, because it's hard to stir two kinds of resin together in a half-inch wineglass without spilling. "Don't bang the table, guys!" ordered a woman who had brought along 3-D magnifying glasses, a sign of someone who has been around the doll-house block a few times. "My olive's not dropping!" wailed a student who was working on a Martini. A friend who had accompanied her to the class was disappointed with her red wine, whose pin dot of black was more like a pencil dot. "It looks like Manischewitz." She decided to add a few orange and lemon slices and turn it into sangria.

After the workshop, the participants had been invited to a happy hour, at which they could show off their finished cocktails. (There were no real-sized ones.) Barbara Fales had brought drink-recipe cards from 1970—when's the last time anyone made a Harvey Wallbanger except for a doll? But most of the students skipped out early. "I wish I could stay," one participant said as she loaded her supplies into an International Guild of Miniature Artisans tote. "But I have another workshop tomorrow—Victorian Doll on Chair. It's from nine to five."

—Ann Hodgman

OUR SIDEWALKS VESTIBULE



When an honest man accidentally corners the market in a product that he always describes to his customers as fairly ineffective and basically illegal to use, he is entitled to moments of puzzled reflection—such as the one that Lawrence LoIacono experienced on a recent afternoon as he sat in his parked car in SoHo, watching people pass in and out of a fancy bakery through the spring-loaded door of a temporary winter vestibule. LoIacono is the president of the Acme Awning Company, a Bronx-based firm that designed and built the vestibule: a box of taut red fabric pulled over a steel frame, bolted to the sidewalk in front of the bakery's door—a tent the size of a lavatory cubicle. “I don’t know what it does,” LoIacono said, finally. “The whole bakery is about five times the size of the vestibule. It’s a hundred square feet in there! That’s it. There’s nobody sitting inside. They walk in, get a brioche, they walk out. Tell me who’s getting cold in there.”

To LoIacono’s surprise and faint dismay, New York now has a vestibule season. There comes a point in the year—it has just arrived—when LoIacono answers his phone and expects to hear a restaurant owner ask him about a cold-weather vestibule. LoIacono typically advises the restaurant owner not to order a vestibule; and then the restaurant owner orders a vestibule. This has been going on for about ten years. It’s an unusual business.

LoIacono is a solid man in his early fifties, with a hoarse, exasperated voice; he sounds as if he had just finished shouting. As he drove between appointments the other day, he described how Acme, which was founded by his father, had been built on the two traditional encroachments that the city’s buildings make onto sidewalk space: awnings and canopies. (Awnings run along the side of buildings, shading windows, while canopies jut out from them as far as the curb, allowing small dogs to ride in

taxis to playdates without getting wet.)

As he drove, LoIacono tied the evolution of vestibules both to the enclosed clear plastic awnings that shield the outdoor produce at delis and to the kind of long-established apartment-house canopies that are built with drapes flanking the entrance—providing extra protection for a person standing just outside the door. Now, if you were to end the canopy at the limit of those drapes, and put, at the open end, a door that snapped closed, you would have a rudimentary winter vestibule. (And in vestibules rudimentary is about as good as it gets.)

At some point in the mid-nineteen-nineties, an Upper East Side restaurant ordered a structure of this kind from Acme Awning. Although LoIacono does not say that he invented the form, he does wonder if this was the first one ever in the city and, perhaps, the country: he had certainly never seen one before in New York, and, as for other cities, he says, “Chicago, Boston—you’re lucky if you even find awnings.”

Driving through SoHo, LoIacono pointed out the shoddy work of one of his competitors—“People paid for that?”—and then recalled that his first vestibule order had caused him to “shake in my pants. I said, ‘You know you’re not supposed to do this?’” According to



LoIacono’s understanding of the city codes, it was legal to erect a storm enclosure during the winter, but the enclosure’s door—which would have to open outward—would reach too far out onto the sidewalk. By this measure, a vestibule would be legal only if it was built into a deeply recessed doorway—a tunnel, really. And a restaurant with a tunnel would probably have an actual,

permanent vestibule: wood, glass, an etching of a schooner.

The city’s restaurateurs disregarded LoIacono’s legal opinion, and he was doomed to build one vestibule after another. “They’re nothing but trouble,” he said. “They have moving parts; they’re fiddly; there’s a lot of sticking and sewing. They’re time-consuming. In the same time it takes to make them, my guys could knock out a canopy, and we’d get four or five times what I get for these.” The bulk of LoIacono’s trade remains the long Park Avenue canopy, but Acme has made more than a hundred vestibules in the past ten years, at about two thousand dollars apiece (including those at Pastis, Five Points, Il Buco, Le Singe Vert, and Craft Bar); by LoIacono’s estimate, this probably represents about a third of Manhattan’s business.

“Is it just a status symbol?” LoIacono asked. “Is it out there like the Hummer?” He went on, “A vestibule gives the client a perceived notion of warmth. What I tell everybody is, if a person is walking into the restaurant and closing the door and opening up the next one, then it will work.” But, in truth, that rarely happens, “and if you have two couples walking in at the same time, and the first gentleman holds the first door and the next gentleman opens the second, then you don’t have a prayer.”

LoIacono pulled up outside Café Gitane on Mott Street, in Nolita, where Acme had installed a new vestibule the previous day. The restaurant manager had called in about a broken spring. “And now I’ve got to send the truck down here to change the spring,” LoIacono said, gloomily. “It takes ten minutes to change the spring but an hour to drive here to do it.” He walked into the vestibule. He paused for a moment. Almost despite himself, he looked around this odd blue chamber with a kind of pride: the fabric was tight on the frame, and the frame followed the sidewalk’s slope, for a good fit. And then he noticed something unusual: the restaurant had run electricity into the space, and installed an illuminated menu in one of the vestibule’s clear plastic windows. “Well, that is a very nice-looking vestibule,” LoIacono said.

—Ian Parker

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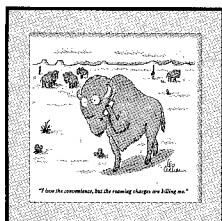
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LETTER FROM AMSTERDAM

FINAL CUT

After a filmmaker's murder, the Dutch creed of tolerance has come under siege.

BY IAN BURUMA

"It's the South Bronx," my friend Max Pam said as he drove me to his old neighborhood, the Overtoomse Veld, in west Amsterdam. Whatever it was, it wasn't the South Bronx. Dreary rather than menacing, more shabby than poor, the neighborhood of gray concrete nineteen-fifties tenements had changed drastically in one respect since Max lived there as a child. Once a suburb for young Dutch families, the Overtoomse Veld is now inhabited almost entirely by immigrants, mainly people of Moroccan or Turkish origin. Areas like this, to the west, east, and north of Amsterdam, are often called "dish cities," because of the many satellite dishes picking up TV stations in North Africa and the Middle East.

The men came first, as migrant workers in the late nineteen-sixties, to do jobs that the Dutch no longer wished to do: hard and dirty jobs in industry, or cleaning buildings and streets. Women followed about a decade later, often as brides, usually illiterate, dispatched straight from their villages to strange men in an even stranger land. Most of the workers are now worn out, unemployed, living on welfare. Their wives still inhabit a strange country, whose language and customs they never mastered.

There are roughly a million and a half first-generation immigrants in the Netherlands (ten per cent of the population), among them Turks and Surinamese, along with refugees from all over Africa and Asia. The Surinamese, mostly of Indian or African descent, already spoke Dutch in their native country, a former Dutch colony, and are relatively well integrated. The Turkish immigrants live mainly quiet and increasingly prosperous lives. The most problematic minority, in terms of street crime and other forms of maladjustment, is the Moroccans—many of them Moroccan Berbers originally from remote villages in the Rif Mountains.

The streets of Max's old neighbor-

hood were remarkably empty, except for some veiled women and old men in djellababs, frequenting halal butchers and stores that offer cheap telephone connections to North Africa. Young men with little to do—*hang jongeren*, or "hangabouts"—loitered around August Allebé Square, where petty crime is common. Max pointed out the broken windows in his old school, now a so-called black school, where most of the children are from Muslim families.

Max is a successful writer and newspaper columnist, a figure on the Amsterdam literary scene, and a close friend of the filmmaker Theo van Gogh, who was murdered on November 2nd. Van Gogh was riding his bicycle to work when a bearded young man, dressed in a long Middle Eastern-style shirt, shot him several times. Van Gogh begged for mercy, and reportedly said, in a peculiarly Dutch phrase, "Surely we can talk about this." The young man then pulled out a knife, slit van Gogh's throat from ear to ear, kicked the dying body, and walked away. He had apparently hoped to die himself, as a martyr in his holy war, but was arrested a short time after the murder. Van Gogh, meanwhile, lay on the street with a letter pinned to his stomach by the killer's knife.

Mohammed Bouyeri—or Mohammed B., as he is called in the Dutch press—is not a great stylist, but his letter is written in the clear prose of an educated Dutchman. It contains a farewell poem that begins, "This is my last word, riddled with bullets, baptized in blood, as I had hoped." The poem is followed by jihadist slogans, and a letter to the Somali-born Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who wrote the script for Theo van Gogh's last film, "Submission." She is called an "unbelieving fundamentalist" and a heretic in the service of her lying "Jewish masters," "products of the Talmud" who "dominate Dutch politics." Hirsi Ali would be smashed against the hard diamond of

Islam. The United States, Europe, Holland—all were doomed.

Mohammed Bouyeri, twenty-six, was born in Amsterdam and grew up in Max Pam's old neighborhood. His family background is fairly typical for a second-generation Moroccan immigrant. His father speaks halting Dutch, and has been crippled by years of menial labor. No

who could talk to city councillors and social workers. He knew his way around the intricate byways of Holland's generous welfare system, where applying for subsidies is an essential skill.

Things didn't quite work out as Mohammed had hoped, however. A subsidy for a community center he'd been lobbying for was turned down. A promised

site called Marokko.nl, allegedly written by Mohammed, promoting fundamentalist views on such subjects as the proper place of women.

Perhaps it was his mother's death, or perhaps it was the series of setbacks and disappointments he encountered; in any event, Mohammed became unhinged. In his tiny apartment, he held meetings with an extremist group based in The Hague. A Syrian cleric spoke to the group about holy war. Two of his new friends were Western converts—one the son of an American—who made plans to blow up the Dutch parliament. Once a model pupil, apparently well adjusted to Dutch society, Mohammed Bouyeri became a holy warrior.

Theo van Gogh—fat, blond, absurdly generous toward his friends and madly vindictive toward his enemies, a worshipper of Roman Polanski, a talented filmmaker who never had enough patience to produce a masterpiece, a heavy smoker and consumer of cocaine and fine wines, a columnist of some style and shocking vulgarity, a doting father, a disgusting slob adored by many women, a provocateur, and a man of principle—had embarked on a very different kind of war: a war against what he regarded as hypocrisy and cant. We were slight acquaintances, and I always enjoyed his company. Not being part of the Amsterdam scene, I never felt the sting of his enmity.

Like most people of his and my post-war generation in Holland, Theo van Gogh was marked by stories of the Second World War, when the majority of Dutch people minded their own business while a minority (about a hundred thousand Jews, out of an estimated hundred and forty thousand) were taken away to be murdered. Van Gogh's family, descended from Vincent's brother Theo, was exceptional. His father fought in the resistance, as did his uncle, who was executed by the Germans. Van Gogh often referred to the war in his writings. "The jackboots are on the march again," he wrote of the Islamists in Holland, "but this time they wear kaftans and hide behind their beards." The Dutch officials, social workers, and politicians who appeased them were, in van Gogh's eyes, akin to collaborators. A frequent target of his abuse was Amsterdam's mayor, Job Cohen, who has tried to preserve civic harmony by making a show of treating

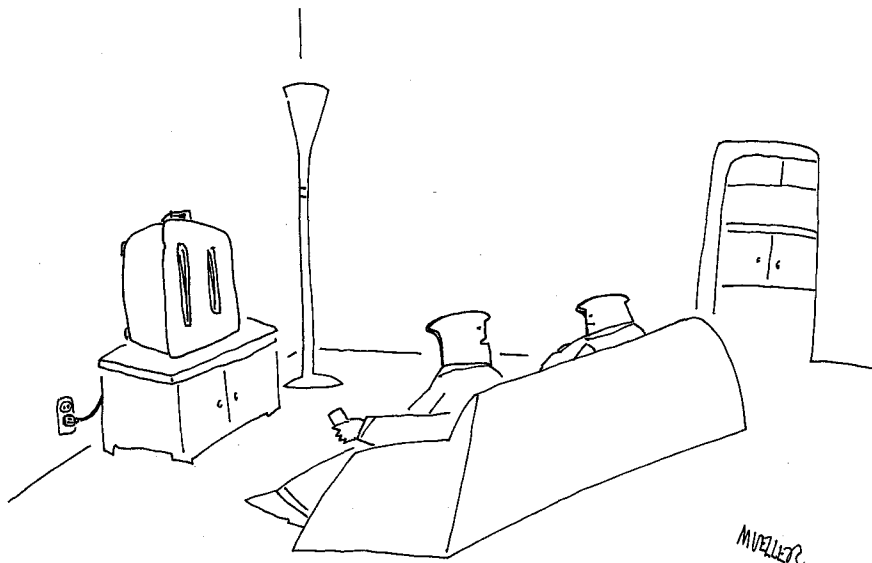


Van Gogh's delight in provocation and Hirsi Ali's rage proved an explosive mixture.

longer able to kneel, he has to pray sitting in a chair. Mohammed has three sisters and one brother. His mother died of cancer in 2002.

Mohammed was never a hangabout. On the contrary, he had a good high-school education, and was known to his teachers as a promising young man. He was, as they say in the neighborhood, a *positivo*, who would surely make it in Dutch society. Not just ambitious for himself, Mohammed was always helping out troubled Moroccan kids, making plans for a youth program at his old school, and writing uplifting articles for a neighborhood bulletin. He was someone

renovation scheme for public housing never materialized. His mother's death came as a shock. That year, Mohammed abandoned his studies in social work, went on welfare, and behaved in ways that were increasingly odd. In a meeting with community officials, he loudly proclaimed that Allah was the only God. He gave up alcohol, prayed all the time, refused to shake hands with women, and drifted to a fundamentalist mosque, El Tawheed. There he met Syrians and Algerians, who had been coming to Holland since September 11th, usually from France and Germany, to give religious instruction. Messages appeared on a Web



"Are the kids asleep?"

Muslims with respect and understanding. "If anyone has not learned from '40-'45 how unwise it is to want to live with marching jackboots who demand 'respect,' it's the mayor," van Gogh wrote. Cohen, as it happens, was among the "Jewish masters" whom Mohammed Bouyeri singled out as enemies of Islam.

For van Gogh, the worst crime was to look away. One of his bugbears was the long-standing refusal (since abandoned) of the Dutch press to identify the ethnic origin of criminals, so as not to inflame prejudice. He saw this as a sign of abject cowardice. To show respect for Islam without mentioning the Islamic oppression of women and homosexuals was an act of disgusting hypocrisy. In a free society, he believed, everything should be said openly, and not just said but shouted, as loudly and offensively as possible, until people got the point. It was not enough to call attention to illiberal Muslims; they were to be identified as "goat-fuckers."

Van Gogh often expressed his admiration for the late Pim Fortuyn, the populist politician, who regularly proclaimed that there was no room for a bigoted religious minority in a liberal society, and that "Holland was full." Van Gogh called Fortuyn, who was assassinated in 2002 by a deranged animal-rights activist, "the divine baldie," partly to annoy the *bien-pensant* liberals, who were quick to denounce any criticism of minorities as racism. His friend Max Pam thinks that van Gogh's

attitude was mixed with professional rage; like Mohammed Bouyeri, van Gogh had trouble getting state subsidies, not for community centers but for his films. Yet there is no getting around van Gogh's nasty streak. When the novelist and filmmaker Leon de Winter, whose work often revolves around his Jewish family background, managed to get public money for his projects, van Gogh detected cynical manipulation and sentimental cant. "Hey, it smells like caramel today—well then, they must be burning the diabetic Jews," he wrote, mocking what he saw as a Jewish cult of victimhood. He described the Jewish historian Evelien Gans as "having wet dreams" about the Auschwitz doctor Josef Mengele. In the guilt-ridden land of Anne Frank, there is a certain amount of strained piety about such topics, but van Gogh's response had all the subtlety of the Dutch football hooligans who find it amusing to abuse an Amsterdam soccer club known as "the Jews' club" by mimicking the sound of escaping gas. Van Gogh seemed to regard delicacy as a sign of fraudulence, and in this he spared no one; Jesus, in his book, was "that rotting fish in Nazareth."

For all his seeming intolerance, though, van Gogh was one of the few Dutch filmmakers to take a real interest in actors with a Moroccan background. "Najib en Julia," a series made for television, is a highly sympathetic story about the love between a Dutch girl and a Moroccan boy. And

personal attacks, though seldom as virulent as van Gogh's, are a common feature of Dutch literary politics, where everyone knows everyone else. It is the violent rhetoric of a place where words are normally without serious consequences.

This is not the kind of place that Mohammed Bouyeri yearned for, and it was not the kind of place that Ayaan Hirsi Ali came from. They take things more seriously in Somalia, where she was born, and in Saudi Arabia, where she partly grew up. Suffering genital mutilation as a child was serious, as was a horrific beating she told of having received from a Muslim teacher in Kenya, when she no longer wished to attend his lessons. When her father, a dissident Somali politician, promised her in marriage to a distant cousin, his word of honor was absolute. And so was her resolve to defy the culture whose strictures she could no longer endure.

She escaped to Holland in 1992, learned to speak perfect Dutch, studied political science, worked with abused Muslim women, and became a politician, first in the social-democratic Labor Party and then in the more conservative Liberal Party. Hers is a politics of rage. Pim Fortuyn was right, she said, to call Islam a "backward religion." Muslim schools should be abolished, and men who beat their wives and daughters should be punished by law. There is no doubt about the seriousness of her aims, and there is no doubt about the seriousness of the Muslims who regard her as an apostate and have called for her death.

Since September 11th, her views have had a receptive audience, but the collaboration with Theo van Gogh—the combination of her rage and his desire to offend—was bound to be particularly explosive. The subject of the eleven-minute film they made, "Submission," is the abuse of women in the name of Allah. A young narrator tells the story of Muslim women in a quiet voice: flogged for a youthful love affair, raped by an uncle, forced into a repulsive marriage. All the while, words from the Koran appear, written on naked female bodies. Friends advised Hirsi Ali against making the film. It would lead to violence, they said. Muslims, distracted by the form, would not be receptive to the message. Her answer was that shock was the best route to awareness, and she is planning a

sequel. But at the moment she is in such deep hiding that even her closest friends have not been able to reach her.

Many things happened as a result of Theo van Gogh's murder, some violent, some merely bizarre. The rash of arson attacks on mosques and Muslim schools was perhaps to be expected, as were racist messages on Web sites and walls, and even on some of the floral tributes to van Gogh. "R.I.P. Theo!" was the message of one of the arsonists. Almost as predictable were some of the defensive reactions by young men of Moroccan origin, who cheered as they passed the spot of the filmmaker's death. Friends of van Gogh, meanwhile, organized a raucous party, with a rock band, bottles of champagne ranged around a coffin, and two stuffed goats mounted on a stage, "for those who feel the urge." This defiance could be seen as typical of cool, ironic Amsterdam. But there was an element also of van Goghian jeering, as though it were necessary, in his memory, to fan the fires a little higher.

In the week following the murder, politicians showed signs of panic. The justice minister, Piet Hein Donner, who is a Calvinist of the old school, suggested that a rather archaic law against blasphemy should be applied, something that had not been done since 1966, when the novelist Gerard van het Reve was prosecuted for comparing his conversion to the Catholic faith to making tender love to a donkey. Donner's suggestion was not followed. Another politician, Geert Wilders, started a party of his own, the Groep Wilders, with a platform of barring all non-Western immigrants for five years and arresting Islamists, even when, as he put it to me, they are only "prepared" to break the law. Although, like Hirs Ali, he has to hide from people who wish him dead, this hitherto obscure parliamentarian has soared in the opinion polls, and has positioned himself as the next Pim Fortuyn. In some estimates, his party would capture almost twenty per cent of the Dutch house of representatives if there were to be an election today. (In another poll, asking who the greatest figure in Dutch history was, Pim Fortuyn came second only to William the Silent.)

In the midst of all this zaniness, the commentators talked and talked: "Hol-

land has lost its innocence"; "the end of multiculturalism"; "tolerance has its limits." The general trend was rightward, and toward an atmosphere of perhaps exaggerated anxiety. Max Pam was not the only person I spoke to who believed that if the authorities didn't tackle the Islamist problem now Holland would eventually have a civil war on its hands. Conservatives, who had warned for many years that Muslim immigration would cause problems, found new allies among former leftists. And liberals, such as Job Cohen, who had promoted tolerance and multiculturalism were denounced as irresponsible softies.

A key text in this national discussion was by Paul Scheffer, a social critic and an influential thinker in the Labor Party. In *NRC Handelsblad*, the most important national broadsheet, he wrote, "Segregation in the big cities is growing, and this is very bad news. That is why the soothing talk of diversity and dialogue, of respect and reason, no longer works. Tolerance can survive only within clear limits. Without shared norms about the rule of law, we cannot productively have differences of opinion. . . . The self-declared impotence of our government to guarantee public order is the biggest threat to tolerance." To be sure, Scheffer had been

saying this kind of thing for some time, but when old lefties cry out for law and order you know something has shifted in the political climate; it is now a common perception that the integration of Muslims in Holland has failed.

The Pieter Nieuwland College, situated in eastern Amsterdam near the spot where van Gogh was murdered, is a so-called confessional school, of Protestant denomination. Around sixty per cent of the pupils are from ethnic minorities—not an unusual number for schools in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague. Most Dutch educational establishments have a religious affiliation, as is true of some broadcasting companies, newspapers, and several political parties. These so-called pillars of Dutch civil society were developed in the late nineteenth century to pacify tensions and conflicts between the different religious communities. Most have been drained of their religious content by now, but the forms remain, and the state continues to subsidize confessional schools, including Muslim ones. What once worked to keep the peace among Protestants and Catholics, some people argue, now encourages illiberal religious prejudices, im-



"Remember, we can only afford to do all this pro bono because of how much anti bono pays."

ported from the Middle East by people who don't even speak Dutch.

I asked the principal of Pieter Nieuwland, W. J. M. Raeven, about the reaction in his school to the murder. He replied that there had been more tensions among the teachers than among the pupils. Adults, he said, "have this 'us and them' feeling that pupils don't really share." Still, he continued, there had been serious discussions in the classrooms, and these were encouraged, as long as they were carried out politely and in Dutch. (Only standard Dutch may be spoken in school.)

When our conversation turned to Mohammed Bouyeri, Raeven said that teachers had learned a lesson in recent years. It was wrong, he concluded, to put too much pressure on minority children. "We used to encourage them to work harder than other children, to go that extra length," he said. "And many of them did, especially the girls, because education is one way of gaining independence from their fathers. But we put too much pressure on them. Even when they have done everything we asked of them, they will have disappointments. It is often harder for Muslim children to find jobs, for example. And when that happens they can get very angry indeed."

A social-studies class I visited included Africans, Indians, Turks, Moroccans, an Egyptian, and a few whites. We had a discussion about van Gogh and Hirsi Ali, and the only girl in class who wore a veil spoke more often and more passion-

ately than the others. The girl, who was born in Amsterdam to Moroccan parents, didn't condone the murder but could "understand why Mohammed B. had sought comfort in Islam." She said that people had insulted her in the streets after the murder, spitting at her feet or telling her to take off her veil. "When I hear people talk about 'those fucking Moroccans,' I feel defensive and really want to be Moroccan, but when I visit Morocco I know I don't belong there, either." A Moroccan-born boy said that it was because of her Dutch accent.

I noticed that some of the Muslim boys, who were described to me later as "quite fundamentalist," snickered every time the veiled girl spoke, even when she argued, to loud protests from the other girls, that Muslim women were not oppressed. "Hirsi Ali is a dork," she said. "She doesn't look beyond her own experience." The whites in the class remained silent, as though afraid to enter this treacherous terrain. One of the black students made fun of the Muslims' preoccupation with "identity" and said, "Moroccan, Egyptian, Algerian—who the fuck cares. They're all thieves." The others laughed, even some of the Muslims. A dark-skinned girl with Indian features suddenly spoke: "I think Hirsi Ali is really brave. She is saying things no one else has the guts to talk about." A Turkish boy who had tried to see both sides of the question said that maybe Hirsi Ali's film had not been the best way to convince moderate Muslims.

I came away impressed with the pupils' readiness to argue: on the surface, integration, at least at this school, seemed to be working all right. It was also clear how diverse "the Muslims" were. Those born in Holland, like the girl in the veil, seemed the most troubled, uncertain of where they belonged. And the Turks appeared to be more at ease than the Moroccans. Leaving the school, I thought of a press conference I had attended the previous day, when Muslim community leaders shook hands with a district councillor and discussed a "contract" to defend free speech and identify extremists. The Turkish representative spoke perfect Dutch, wore a business suit, and agreed with the proposal. The Moroccan representative spoke broken Dutch, and still needed "to consult" with his mosque.

One thing that angered both the Turkish and the Moroccan pupils in the Pieter Nieuwland College class was the tendency to lay the blame for terrorism indiscriminately on all Muslims. "Everything they hear about the culture of their parents is negative," Raeven told me. One response to this is to view Mohammed Bouyeri simply as a madman. This is what Ahmed Larouz, a Moroccan who came to Holland as a teen-ager in the late nineteen-eighties, thinks: "I can't explain what he did. If two hundred and eighty others had done the same thing, you could perhaps find an answer, but what he did was crazy. Maybe Islam made him even crazier. Then again, he knew nothing about Islam. I grew up in Muslim schools. Mohammed B. just cobbled his religion together in two years."

Larouz sees himself as a Dutch-Moroccan role model. In 1997, together with four other Moroccan students, he set up TANS (Towards a New Start), an organization that aimed at giving Muslims a more positive role in society. Today, Larouz works in an ultramodern office, wears snappy pin-striped suits, is attended to by secretaries in miniskirts, and talks like an old-fashioned American booster, full of pep and vigor. English is only one of the many languages he speaks. "Cultural management," in the private and public sectors, is his business. He quoted lines by the rapper Tupac Shakur: "Mama, don't cry, long as we try, maybe things are gonna change, perhaps it's just a fantasy."

But Larouz remains an exceptional

PERHAPS HE WAS TOO CLOSE TO THE SITUATION,
BUT AESOP FAILED TO SEE ANY GODDAM
MORAL TO THE STORY OF THE GODDAM BIRDS
EATING HIS GODDAM TOMATOES AGAIN....



figure. He had already attended high school in Morocco before he joined his parents in Holland, a place he had imagined as a land of freedom. He came not from a village in the Rif Mountains but from a city east of Casablanca. Though his father made his living in Holland as a cleaner, several of Ahmed's siblings have graduate degrees. Larouz is proud to represent Holland at international conferences. Near his office door is a photograph of him shaking hands with Queen Beatrix. Ahmed Larouz is what Mohammed Bouyeri might have been.

Naturally, it is Bouyeri, not Larouz, whom Frits Bolkestein, the former leader of the Dutch Liberal Party and, until last November, the European Union commissioner, had in mind when, in the early nineties, he began to warn about the possible consequences of an uncontrolled influx of Muslims. The foreign-born population of Amsterdam was growing at one per cent a year. At that rate, he said, the main Dutch cities would have Muslim majorities in a decade or two. The government policy at the time was "integration while maintaining identity." In practice, the idea was to deal with Muslims much as previous Dutch governments had dealt with Protestants and Catholics, by creating another "pillar." Bolkestein disagreed, and wanted to have a debate.

Sitting with Bolkestein in his new office in the center of Amsterdam, I asked him to recall the days when he spoke out against the government policy. "The policy was complete nonsense, of course," he says. "I wrote a piece in 1991 saying that integration would not work if our fundamental values clashed with those of the immigrants: separation of church and state, for instance, or the equality of men and women. Those things could not be negotiated, not even a little bit."

What happened? "Well, half the world came down on me," he says. "I was called racist, a hater of Islam. At one point, I feared for my personal safety." None of the mainstream political parties wished to engage in a serious debate on these issues. "Blinded by ideology, people could not see what was going on," he says, "but I was enough of a politician to sense what ordinary people in 'church and bar' were feeling, and I decided to tap into that." This might sound like the typical talk of a right-wing populist, but many liberals, including

Paul Scheffer, now regard Bolkestein as a hero, someone who had the courage to speak the truth when others were dodging the issue. Certainly, Bolkestein is a sophisticated thinker, and the refusal to take his arguments seriously had the unfortunate result that church and bar—*kerk en kroeg*, as the Dutch say—fell into the hands of demagogic politicians such as Pim Fortuyn. A flashy dresser and an openly gay man, Fortuyn was an unlikely hero in this ultra-bourgeois country, but his message that foreign intolerance could no longer be tolerated, and that it was time to restore bourgeois order by kicking out those foreigners, made him wildly popular. It was as though the Dutch, having looked the other way for so long, had woken up to a problem and were now demanding a radical solution.

Geert Wilders, the current promoter of anti-immigrant populism, has none of Fortuyn's flamboyant appeal, although his extraordinary hairdo, a kind of lacquered blond bouffant, draped around a pink baby face, could be seen as a brave attempt at it. A former deputy and speechwriter for Bolkestein, he left the Liberal Party in September, 2004, because he felt it was pulling too much toward the center, while he wanted to go further to the right. Wilders has become an important figure on the post-van Gogh scene, though his efforts to organize a new party are somewhat hampered by the fact that he needs twenty-four-hour protection and has to stay in safe houses.

I saw him in his well-guarded office at Parliament, in The Hague. Wilders is a man obsessed with one idea: Holland's failure to confront the Islamist threat. Nervously shuffling the few items on his desk, he spoke fast, as if there were no more time to lose: "It's no coincidence that the first ritual slaughter happened here. We just let everybody in. There is no sense of urgency. The French intelligence people can't believe how sloppy we are." He reeled off names of people and organizations that, he said, have been operating in the Netherlands with impunity. "I'm furious that the Dutch government is incapable of taking hard measures. That would be better for the moderate Muslims, too. We must crack down. In this country, politicians have always tried to pacify minorities by molycoddling them. All that holding of hands. It makes me sick."

But cracking down may not be so easy.

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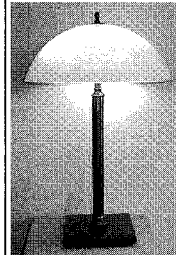
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Wilders's idea that only non-Western foreigners should be stopped from coming to the Netherlands is morally hard to condone, and arresting people on the mere suspicion of what they might do is not exactly in accordance with European human-rights treaties. Wilders insists that he is not a racist, or anti-Islam, even though he feels "in the depths of my heart that Islam is not compatible with democracy." But he is engaged in the politics of fear, and fear is not a recipe for democratic moderation. "Van Gogh is only the beginning," he said, just before we parted, "and you ain't seen nothing yet."

If fear has been stoked among the white population of the Netherlands, it is perhaps even more acute among the Muslim minorities. One afternoon, I took the ferry to a district called Amsterdam-North, built for dockworkers in the nineteen-tens and twenties. It is now the poorest Moroccan area of the city. Paul Scheerder, a former newspaperman, opened a home there for abused women and children. He married a Moroccan and converted to Islam. We drank mint tea in his office, and he told me about three girls staying in his shelter whose father stabbed his wife to death two years ago. We were joined by the neighborhood cop.

I asked them both how van Gogh's murder had affected the streets of Amsterdam-North. "Fear," the policeman said, while Scheerder nodded. "People were afraid of going out, frightened that they would be attacked for being Muslims. We put some extra security around the mosque, and people were very grateful for that."

Things have calmed down since the first weeks after the killing, but Scheerder is still worried. He doesn't like the idea of a new mosque being built in the area. It might be seen as a provocation. "We don't want another murder, because then all hell could break loose," he says. Scheerder tells me that he has seen boys like Mohammed Bouyeri, who seem all right one day and then suddenly go berserk. "People watch Moroccan and other Arab television stations," he said, "and they see the Americans as the greatest criminals in history."

This is the problem. Although Theo van Gogh was Dutch and was killed by a Dutch citizen, in the end this is not just a Dutch story but a Middle Eastern one imported to the heart of Europe. Mo-

ammed Bouyeri, and hundreds like him, have plugged into a wider world of violent Web-based rhetoric and terrorist cells. The integration of Muslims in the Netherlands has not been a greater failure than anywhere else. But the country may have been less prepared for the holy war.

When the world comes to an end, Heinrich Heine is supposed to have said, one should go to Holland, for everything there happens fifty years later. This has not been true for quite a long time, but the attitude, bred by centuries of peace and prosperity, has lingered. The First World War passed by the Netherlands, which remained happily neutral. The Second World War did not, which is why the German Occupation, though much less brutal than it was, say, in Poland, was so traumatic.

After the war, and especially since the nineteen-sixties, the Dutch prided themselves on having built an oasis of tolerance, a kind of Berkeley writ large, where people were free to do their own thing. Liberated, at last, from the strictures of religion and social conformity, the Dutch, especially in Amsterdam, frolicked in the expectation that the wider world would not disturb their perfect democracy in the polders. Now the turbulent world has come to Holland at last, crashing into an idyll that astonished the citizens of less favored nations. It's a shame that this had to happen, but naïveté is the wrong state of mind for defending one of the oldest and most liberal democracies against those who wish to destroy it.

It was raining when I said goodbye to Paul Scheerder. The streets of Amsterdam-North, though bleak, looked peaceful enough. I said as much to Scheerder, who smiled thinly. "There is a lot of grief behind closed doors in this neighborhood," he said. Then he mentioned a news segment about Theo van Gogh on Moroccan TV, and an interview it had featured with a Moroccan immigrant in Amsterdam. I asked Scheerder what the man had said. He thought for a moment and spoke softly: "He said that his death was just, and that he was punished by God." ♦

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EXPECTED LEGISLATION FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY DAN GREENBURG

The Healing a Divided America Act: Shocked and saddened by the divisive nature of the recent Presidential campaign, President Bush will attempt to reach out to and pacify the two warring cultures in our country. Accordingly, a twenty-foot-high concrete security wall, topped by electrified razor wire, will be constructed as a barrier between blue states and red. Democrats and Republicans will have thirty days to relocate to blue states and red states, respectively, or else they will be placed in attractive government relocation camps for their own safety and comfort.

The Tax Simplification Act: Beginning in 2005, all taxpayers in the top one-per-cent income bracket will pay a flat one-per-cent tax, taxpayers in the top two-per-cent bracket will pay a flat two-per-cent tax, and so on.

The Endangered Species Preservation Act: All endangered species will immediately be preserved by a national corps of expert taxidermists.

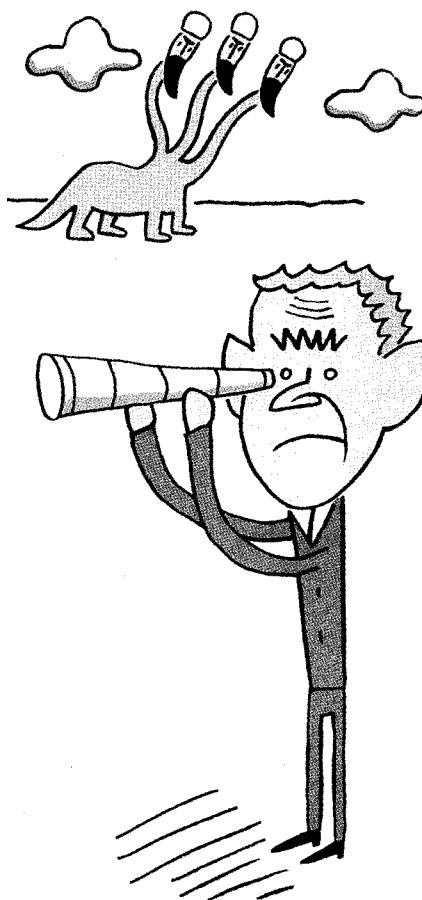
The Empowerment of the Elderly Act: All citizens age sixty-five and over will empower themselves by paying their Social Security benefits directly from their own savings accounts, instead of having to rely on the uncertainty of occasionally tardy mailings from the federal government.

The Affordable Health Care for Everyone Act: All persons, regardless of age, sex, race, or income, will, for a nominal fee, be issued a Band-Aid, two aspirins, a Tums, a wallet-size card illustrating the Heimlich Maneuver, a recipe for chicken soup, and a leech.

The Improved Patriot Act: All citizens will be required to carry identification papers stating their name, date of birth, ethnic background, political affiliation, voting history, medical history, credit history, psychiatric evaluation, favorite color, and most embarrassing sexual fantasy, and listing every book and periodical they've ever read, as well as the things

they might admit to if subjected to any of the ten specific forms of torture currently approved by the U.S. government.

The Gay Rights Act: All persons of the same sex, including family members, will have the right to hug, provided that there be at least two inches of air between their bodies during said hug and provided that both parties continue slapping each



other's back for the duration of the hug.

The Equality in Education Act: In an effort to create equal opportunity for students of all capabilities, educational goals will be readjusted: A and B students will henceforth be characterized as snobbish overachievers. C students will receive scholarships to elite schools, since it is they who have the best chance to grow up to be President. And D stu-

dents will be encouraged to excel by successfully spinning their failures, creating diversionary issues, and impugning the moral values of their teachers.

The Deficit Reduction Act: To raise the funds necessary to cut the deficit in half, a few federal institutions will be sold, privatized, and renamed, the way sports stadiums are; e.g., the Rupert Murdoch Treasury Department and Mint; the Smith & Wesson Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms; the Pfizer Food and Drug Administration; the Halliburton Pentagon; the Enron Department of Correctional Facilities; the House of Saud House of Representatives.

The Enhanced Homeland Security Act: Madame Cleo will be appointed head of airport security; she will train a cadre of psychics to scan the minds of boarding passengers, looking for terrorists. Illegal immigrants along the Mexican border will be subjected to random trick questions, such as whether they like hummus. Heads of households will be issued rocket-propelled grenades.

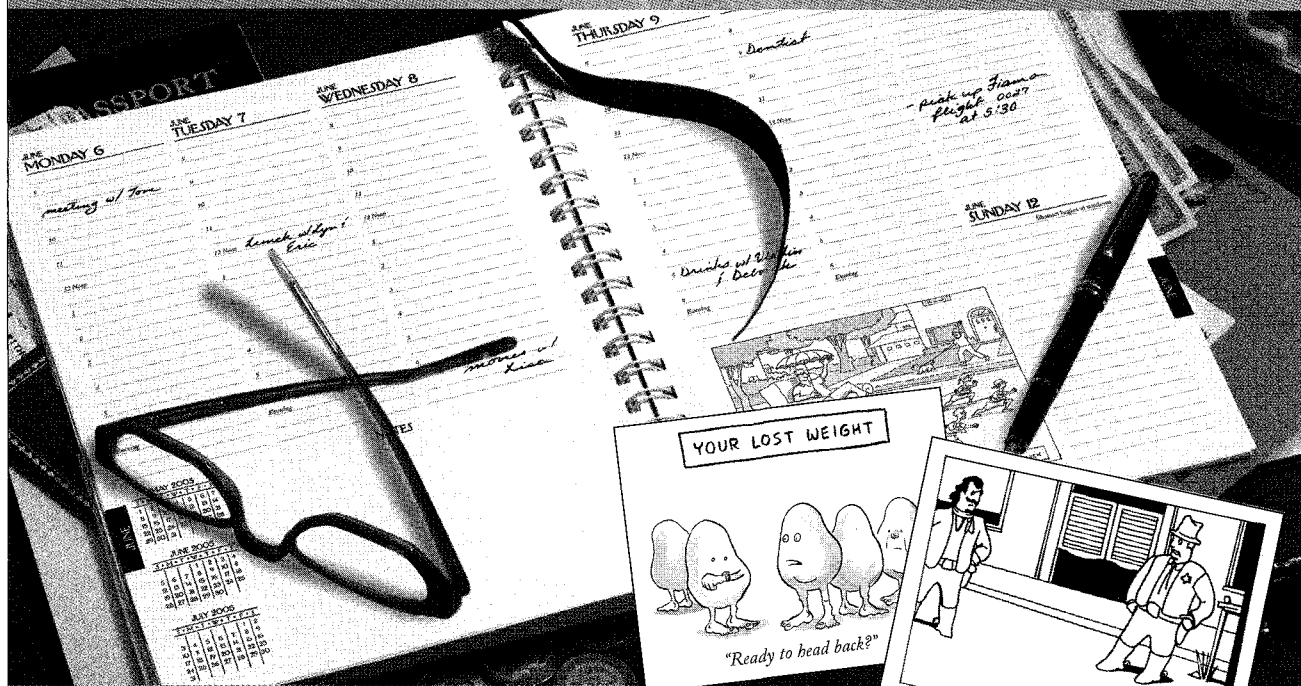
The Prayer in Everyday Life Act: In public schools, there will be compulsory prayers before classes, before lunch, and before recess, and a brief fifty-minute worship service will precede dismissal, at which time baskets will be circulated for offerings to the education fund and the "Jeb in 2008" fund. Prayers will also be instituted in restaurants after the check is presented.

The Job Creation Act: Although a few jobs may have been lost owing to 9/11, hurricanes in Florida, and the recession inherited from the previous Democratic Administration, many new jobs will open up in the next four years, especially for bankruptcy attorneys, mortgage-foreclosure officers, vehicle-repossession agents, suicide counsellors, homeless-shelter operators, and soup-kitchen and breadline personnel.

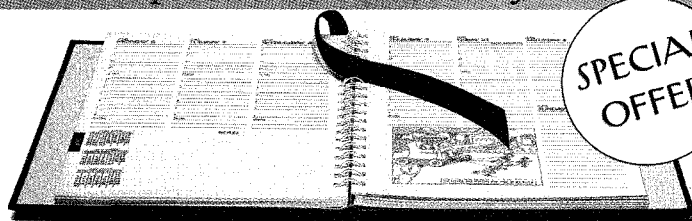
The Keeping Our Young People Out of Harm's Way Act: All young persons age eighteen or over will be placed out of harm's way in training facilities where they will be issued M-16 rifles and taught how to defend themselves in the event of an attack from a hostile power, or, if the country is not attacked, how to defend themselves when dropped off in countries desperately in need of regime change.

The Separation of Church and State Act: There will be no separation of church and state. ♦

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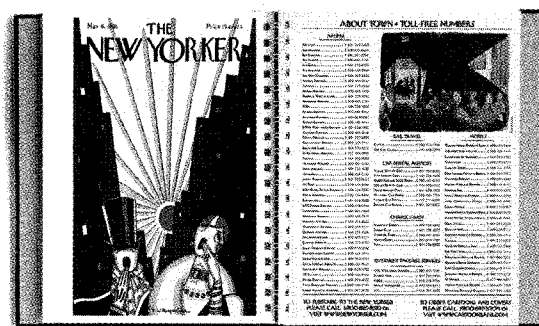
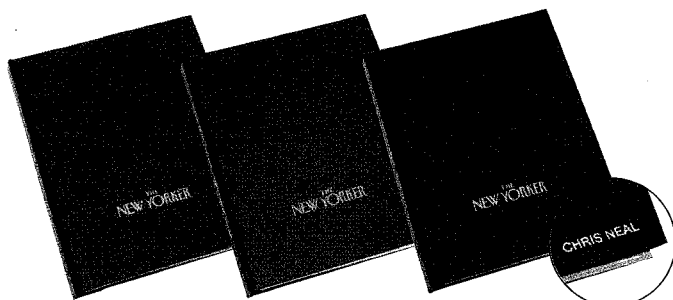
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THE PRICE OF PARADISE

Can a family of four find happiness in Hawaii?

BY CAITLIN FLANAGAN

When I was two years old, I travelled across the country by train from New York to Oakland with my mother and my seven-year-old sister. In the observation car on the first morning, we fell into company with an older gentleman who was journeying slowly home to Honolulu, and who had just suffered a considerable misfortune: he had lost his glasses, only a few hours into the first day of a long trip that he had intended to spend reading. While my mother commiserated with him, I thrust an investigating hand into the crevice between the seat cushions and, to everyone's astonishment, pulled out the glasses. I remember the episode—the bristly prickle of velour on my soft fingers; the stunned delight of the grown-ups—in the vivid, dreamlike manner of most invented memories. But for years afterward I was in possession of the two gifts the man sent me in thanks: a six-inch-tall hula girl and a plastic charm bracelet with a dangling pineapple and palm tree.

The hula girl became the queen of the souvenir shelf, a location littered with trinkets acquired on my family's edifying vacations, and to me she represented a different kind of holiday altogether: one that was undertaken on purely hedonistic impulses, responding only to the deep human need for sand and sea and tropical fruit punches. I was the daughter of an academic whose field was Irish history, and while I had known the thrill of jet travel (that is what it was called in those days, and the very words suggested money and comfort), our airplane trips had always dumped me at the same unromantic port of

call: the Dublin airport, where sheep grazed beside the runway and international travellers were sometimes herded into a drafty immigration hall and sprayed down with pesticide to prevent the spread of hoof-and-mouth disease.

On the other hand—aloha. The very notion of a lei greeting—beauti-



Excursions took on the nature of a prison break.

ful girls with lush flowers on a balmy tarmac—drove me wild with longing and frustration. My sense that Hawaii was a destination of singular allure was reinforced by a childhood heavily invested in watching television. The C & H Sugar Company had a riveting advertisement that featured a little girl running through a field of sugar-

cane, a hibiscus blossom tucked behind one ear. Oahu was the destination of an unprecedented three-part "Brady Bunch," a kind of extended advertisement for United Airlines and the Sheraton Waikiki. When I was a bit older, I began reading Joan Didion's famous essays on the islands, with their mesmerizing descriptions of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, a palace in Honolulu where wealthy Californians sat on a roped-off beach and took the sun together. It was "an enclave of apparent strangers ever on the verge of discovering that their nieces roomed in Lagunita at Stanford the same year, or that their best friends lunched together during the last Crosby. The fact that anyone behind the rope would understand the word 'Crosby' to signify a golf tournament at Pebble Beach suggests the extent to which the Royal Hawaiian is not merely a hotel but a social idea." This was a degree of glamour that threatened to overwhelm me; my experience of sunbathing had been at the community pool, an enclave of housewives ever on the verge of discovering that pork chops were on special at Safeway. The honeymoon following my first wedding was to have consisted of two weeks in Hawaii (at last!) but was then downgraded to a more financially prudent week at an all-in resort in St. Martin, intensifying my fierce, indignant resolve to visit those sun-kissed islands.

And so, inevitably, my first trip to Hawaii (undertaken at the advanced age of thirty-four, with husband No. 2 and my aged parents in tow) was disappointing. I had by then ventured far beyond what had once been the twin poles of my existence, California and Ireland. But Hawaii, I unhappily discovered, wasn't so different from California (palm trees, blue water, Tony Roma's). Worse, because of the intense green and the sheer, mist-shrouded mountains, much of it looked an awful lot like Ireland. I was eager to feel far-flung; the islands of the Hawaiian archipelago are, after all, some of the most remote

in the world. Among the many captivating details in Didion's essays from the seventies was a description of the mainland newspapers arriving a day or two late, lending "the events of the day a peculiar and unsettling distance." But, modernity being what it is, we weren't in the condo five minutes before someone zapped on CNN. In a rude twist of fate, we happened to be there on St. Patrick's Day, the night of which we spent not basking in the trade winds beneath a canopy of stars but hunkered down watching a PBS documentary on the potato famine.

The strange thing about this episode was not that I had a disappointing time; the cost of seeing the world is often disillusionment. What's curious is that I've repeated the experience five times. It seems that I have scarcely unpacked my bags from one dispiriting visit before I start dreaming about going back. I've wondered if I should stay at one of the famous resorts, or on a different island. When I was a girl, the precise locations of my schoolmates' enthralling stories of Hawaiian vacations changed with such regularity that I feared there wouldn't be any Hawaii left for me to go to. Just when I had a grasp of the geography and the principal delights of Waikiki—Diamond Head looming at the end of the crescent beach; the string of white high-rises; the Kodak Hula show; the moan of the conch shell signalling luau time—kids started saying that Honolulu was too crowded, too common. Luau? Those were for grandmas. It was now about catching a wave, it was now about Maui—unspoiled, wild. Then it was Kauai, the Garden Isle, so unvisited that you might find yourself the only person on the beach.

Perhaps the sweetest and most gently misguided impulse of parenthood is to give one's children precisely the thing most yearned for in one's own youth. One Christmas when I was small, my father gave me a model-train set, and he lay on his tummy all day switching tracks and humming happily to himself, while I tiptoed around him with my Barbies. In the same spirit, I resolved long ago that my own little boys' holidays would not be spent in Irish B. and B.s redolent of turf fires and rashers. I would give them Hawaii. And I would not stint.

A travel guide published in 1930 advised, "If you're going to be very grand, stay at the Royal Hawaiian." This is no longer true. Today, if you are going to be very grand you must go to the place where grandness, in its every possible connotation, is king. You must go to the Grand Wailea.

The Grand Wailea, which is situated on a blamelessly beautiful stretch of beach on the leeward side of Maui, has seven hundred and eighty guest rooms, six restaurants (one of them floating), numerous boutiques, more than a thousand full-time workers, a private medical practice, a wedding chapel, a business center, the largest spa in the state, an art gallery that includes four Picasso monotypes and eighteen Léger bronzes, a kids' camp, a seasonal children's concierge, a night club, and the largest ballroom on the island (twenty-eight thousand square feet, not counting the contiguous, twelve-thousand-square-foot Haleakala Gardens, which serve as the ballroom's "pre-function" area). Arguably the hotel's most famous feature—in a tight race with its legendary prices—is the Canyon Activity Pool, a two-thousand-foot-long complex of interconnected swimming pools, waterslides, waterfalls, grottoes, raging rapids, and the world's only "water elevator," all of which can be traversed in a ten-minute "swim ride."

The notion that a Hawaiian hotel might be a residential amusement park with a South Seas theme has been steadily evolving since the nineteen-fifties, when the industrialist Henry Kaiser opened the Hawaiian Village at Waikiki. It had thatched huts and a man-made lagoon, and guests were transported from the airport in an open-air bus with a grass roof. The hotel's slogan—"The Fun Resort"—was a rebuke to the Royal Hawaiian, with its afternoon teas and formal dinners. The resort begat the "mega-resort," which, in turn, begat the Grand Hyatt Wailea, which opened its doors in 1991 and on which the Japanese developer Takeshi Sekiguchi spent six hundred million dollars—reportedly the largest amount of money ever invested in a hotel at the time—mere months before the crash of the Japanese bubble economy. The hotel struggled along—changing manage-

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ment, dropping the "Hyatt," and eventually being sold in 1998 at a loss of more than two hundred million dollars—but the developers' hunch that its commanding magnitude would excite considerable curiosity proved accurate. Indeed, the hotel is often completely booked months in advance. It was to this supercharged pleasure zone that I recently repaired with my husband and our six-year-old twins.

The family vacation, as it is now experienced by many members of the upper middle class, is marked by numerous and often conflicting desires. Busy parents want to spend some uninterrupted time with their children, but they also crave a substantial break from those children. Dad wants sex, but Mom has envisioned an interlude of near-monastic solitude. The intention is to leave work worries far behind, but modern telecommunications have become so advanced, and the contemporary workplace so fast-paced, that the inclination is often to stay in regular contact with the office. The Grand Wailea seems to have an uncannily precise grasp of each of these competing goals, and to have found a way to make money on all of them. When I mentioned to some acquaintances that we were planning a visit, a woman whipped around and said with astonishing vehemence, "Don't!" She had recently been there, and added in disgust, "They charge you for every single thing." She suggested that we change our reservation to the Four Seasons, which is just down the beach and which she described almost as a Communist collective compared with the gouging Grand Wailea.

But when we arrived at the hotel we were received graciously: wreathed in orchid leis and encouraged to help ourselves to cups of tasty iced guava juice. Only much later, while reading some very fine print, did I learn that we had actually bought both treats. The sixteen-dollar-a-day "resort fee" covers one lei greeting per guest and a "Welcome Mai Tai punch (non-alcoholic)." Our room was like a little shop. In addition to the standard minibar setup, there was a basket of suntanning products (seventy dollars), shrink-wrapped bottles of Evian, playing cards,

and children's shampoo for sale. We begged the kids not to touch any of the merchandise.

"Don't forget anything when you go to the beach," the bellman said after dropping off our suitcases. "It's a long way back."

We didn't doubt him, because we could sort of see the beach from our room. I had been persuaded by several members of the pro-Grand Wailea faction back home to ante up for a room in the Napua Tower, which a promotional brochure described as "our hotel within the resort" and an article in *TravelAge West* called "a 100-room oasis," separated from the main grounds by a locked gate. These descriptions made the rest of the outrageously expensive resort seem like a kind of Calcutta-by-the-sea, from which one would crave sanctuary and safety. But the Napua Tower turns out to be one of the greatest marketing innovations of all time. With an audacity that would have impressed P. T. Barnum, the Grand Wailea has managed to turn the concept of "exclusivity" into a plausible excuse for charging some of its highest rates for some of its worst rooms: those with only a partial view of the distant sea. Ours, attractive though unremarkable—except for its majestic marble bathroom—cost five hundred and ninety dollars per night.

It was time for our first swim ride, and we needed to make haste; the waterslides closed at six o'clock each evening, and it was already past four. First, a walk through the lobby—as vast as several football fields, open-air, very pleasant. Then a descent down a sweeping marble staircase, followed by circumnavigation of the adults-only Hibiscus Pool, at which the main pastime seemed to be baking like an oiled capon in a hot oven and reading "The Bourne Supremacy."

At last, the Activity Pool. You register for its use as you would for surgery, by identifying yourself, having your records checked on a computer, and holding out your arm so that you can be tagged with an identifying wristband. The pool is loud and enormous, and hard to figure out. From where we stood, clutching our newly issued towels, we could see a scuba-diving pool, a

man-made beach, a lagoon with a volleyball net, and a grotto containing the egress of two long slides, into which riders landed with a scream every minute or so. Despite the noise and confusion, I found the place inviting, if for no other reason than the water's dazzling blue translucence.

The four of us climbed up a long flight of stairs constructed from ohia wood that had been lashed together, Gilligan's Island style. At the top was a small pool poised high above the complex. Here we had a choice: we could cheat death on a slide so long and dangerous that we would have to be cleared for departure by an attendant—she wielded a walkie-talkie and was in constant contact with someone at splash-down—or we could take a far shorter slide that led through a series of meandering rivers and bays. We opted for the latter, shooting down the little slide and landing in a second, slightly larger pool, with another slide at its far end. And then we got the hang of it, crashing down longer watery tunnels, career-ing in rapid currents past statues of the old Hawaiian gods, emerging in tiny, tranquil pools, and then lurching eagerly through chest-high water to the next slide. At one point, we ducked under a waterfall and found ourselves in a cave containing a swim-up bar, where the atmosphere of good, clean fun suddenly vanished. Somehow, people had managed to get cigarettes in there, so it was smoky and close; booming, drunken voices reverberated off the rock walls. The boys immediately apprehended that the bartender could produce milkshakes. When I handed my son Conor an Oreo smoothie, he accidentally sloshed half of it out of the cup. Normally, we would have scrambled for napkins, but in the swim-up bar there was nothing to do but watch the slick of goo dissipate and drift away. We swam onward, plummeting down white-water rapids, and then letting the current take us to a deep pool with a Tarzan swing. We were chatting with another set of parents when my husband saw a small opaque object bobbing in the water. He reached out and picked it up; it was an empty tube of "personal feminine lubricant." We all stared. "Makes you want to keep your head above water," the other dad said. I



looked warily upstream for what might be coming next, but I could see nothing except the sparkle of sunlight on the bright water.

For what we were spending on our room at the Grand Wailea, we could have stayed at one of the famous hotels of Europe, or at one of the grand old American resorts—the Broadmoor, say, or the Breakers. But these places were not specifically designed to allow us to have our children at our side virtually around the clock, while simultaneously—and guiltlessly—enjoying some of the adult pleasures that we deny ourselves back home. When a parent bellies up to the Napua Tower bar for a stiff one, his child is just across the room, bellying up to the knee-high Shirley Temple bar and mixing a virgin highball of his own. At the Grand Wailea, children and parents exist in a kind of ageless Neverland, in which grownups spend hours happily splashing in kiddie pools and children climb into booster seats at a restaurant where adult entrées cost forty or fifty dollars.

The older hotels, moreover, tend to be haunted by disapproving characters with long memories. A woman who has been visiting the Breakers for fifty years recently carped to a reporter from the *Los Angeles Times* that the children there are “out of control.” But at the Grand Wailea there are no censorious blue-hairs bumming you out for your lax parenting techniques. In fact, the most “adult” presence is that of the hotel management, which, like an indulgent but watchful parent, at once coddles and scolds its guests. During our first night there, a letter from the concierge was slipped under the door, informing us of the next day’s roster of fun and also instructing us not to go to breakfast in bare feet or to the Napua cocktail reception in a bathing suit. The fine print on the sumptuous Spa Grande brochure forbids “ladies on their cycle” from sullyng the Jacuzzi. An army of workers is employed to pick up after the guests who litter the place like careless children, dropping their plastic cocktail glasses wherever they happen to drain them, and leaving behind a trail of pineapple rinds and flower garnishes.

At the Royal Hawaiian, where we



“I haven’t gotten as much done, but I’ve had a lot more energy ever since I replaced Gloria with a smoothie.”

stopped for a couple of nights before going to Maui, the prices are steep but not exorbitant, and old-fashioned proprieties continue to exert themselves. The question of whether it would be appropriate to sashay through the magnificent lobby in swimsuit and flip-flops is answered before it is asked—the bellman advises guests of the location of the old Bathers’ Elevator, which lets you out in an underground corridor buzzing with the secret, purposeful commerce of the hotel: waiters rolling trays for room service, pink-uniformed maids delivering loads of pink towels and sheets to the laundry. Waikiki Beach is as crowded as ever, a restless parade of people on the march: honeymooners and sunburned families and tough-looking teen-agers with boom boxes. But they still give a wide and respectful berth to the ribbon of sand behind the low-slung pink chain that marks the private beach. In the open-air Surf Room, the food is terrible and the service indifferent, but diners sit patiently under pink-and-white awnings, sipping restorative mai tais and talking in soft voices.

The pace of life at the Royal Hawaiian is slow and almost somnolent. Indeed, the principal activity is remembering—or, more accurately, imagining—what it was like in the old days, when children, if they were brought along at all, were accompanied by a starched nanny and were rarely a nuisance. In the cool shadows of

the lobby facing the Coconut Grove, there are photo displays of the famous opening-night dinner, and in a glass-topped case there are some battered silver serving pieces and china place settings from that evening. Beside each elevator there are desks with heavy black Bakelite telephones, still operational. When the maids turn down the beds at night, they leave behind vanda orchids and pink cards bearing a tidbit of historical information for you to ponder—thirty-five thousand barrels of cement were used in the hotel’s construction; in the days before air-conditioning, guest rooms were cooled via louvered doors—before lights-out.

None of this, of course, appeals much to children. Nor does the hotel seem eager to encourage their patronage. The Surf Room offers a children’s menu, but trying to cajole hungry children through its de-facto cocktail hour and the interminable wait for food is a fresh Hell, mai tai or no. The pool is small and plain, and few kids will be stoked to learn that they can borrow a cribbage set from the attendants.

When travelling with small children, it is a good idea to head in an easterly direction, for the time change will work in your favor. Head west and you’re doomed. Our first morning at the Grand Wailea, my boys were awake by four-thirty—entirely, deeply awake. This might not have been so un-

The problem is that children often don't want to go to these places. We had tried to rally enthusiasm the night before by taking the boys on a field trip to the camp, but we got stuck in an elevator with a man and his small son,

Spas promote themselves as purveyors of novel physical sensations—the seaweed wrap, the salt scrub—but many of their clients, harried middle-aged women like me, are drawn to them for the sensory deprivation they offer, the dim lighting and warm fog, and the solicitous, murmuring voices. Still, each establishment must have its signature attraction, and Spa Grande’s is called Termé Wailea Hydrotherapy, a complex of Jacuzzis, chilly plunge pools, specialty showers, and—the centerpiece—a set of five “aromatic baths.” In the brochure,

these five tubs are attractive; in reality, they are smallish and filled with murky water. One is the color of sludge (healing mud); another is the rich, organic green of pond water. Visitors are instructed to shower after using each one, to prevent cross-contamination, an unpleasant reminder that the tubs are essentially filled with cloudy, used bathwater. Also included in the price of admission to Spa Grande is a procedure that calls for you to lie on a metal table in a room that has tiled walls and a drain in the floor and be scrubbed down by an attendant with a loofah and a hose. The only thing to do is yak away, as one does during the most unpleasant parts of a gynecological exam.

After my scrubbing, I felt thoroughly clean—nakedness itself seemed to have been brought to a tender new level—and I couldn't imagine spending another moment in one of the hot tubs or showers without dissolving like an Alka-Seltzer. I wandered around the facility, and thus accidentally discovered Valhalla: a shaded lanai with two neat rows of lounge chairs, none of them occupied.

Somewhere else, this might not have been such a remarkable sight, but at the Grand Wailea one of the hardest things to lay claim to isn't an oceanfront suite or a private butler but a lowly deck chair. Getting a good one at the Activity Pool, which is ringed by countless hundreds of them, involves strategy and determination. It also requires a ruthless disregard for one's fellow-guests—most of the chairs spend their days reserved but unoccupied. Some guests get up at dawn and stumble down to the pool to spread towels across a few prime seats, and then head back to their rooms to sleep for a few more hours. The hotel polices against such practices; a special team of poolside "maitre d's" clears off possessions that are left unattended for more than three hours, but guests find countless ways to get around the authorities. Families travelling with nannies sometimes send them down to the pool before sunrise, where they are charged with guarding the real estate.

Reserving a chair is rude, yet most of the people I encountered at the hotel were not rude. The husbands were gregarious to a fault; the wives were quick to take an interest in one another's children. But something about the hotel's

prices occasionally causes a breakdown in the social order; the thought of spending so much money on a tropical vacation and not even getting to sit in a deck chair produces a kind of madness. The hotel capitalizes on this by charging rent on the best chairs—those shaded by umbrellas or cabanas. Just as dieting produces an instant fixation on food, the chair situation seemed to be a preoccupation all over the hotel; friends who stayed at the Grand Wailea last winter remember their chair struggles more vividly than anything else. I lay down on the best of the lanai deck chairs, closed my eyes, and rested in the filtered light.

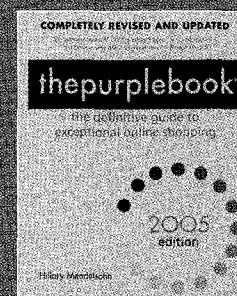
The short holiday wore on, and the days quickly developed a pattern: morning and afternoon visits to the Activity Pool, an off-site lunch somewhere cheap, dinner cobbled from the Napua Tower's "hearty hors d'oeuvres" spread, and a nighttime walk around the hotel's capacious gardens, which were lit by tiki torches and almost deserted. With each visit to the Activity Pool, the boys' passion for it swelled, as did my dread. Just walking onto the wet flagstones at its outermost edge, hearing the yelps of delight and the roaring waterfalls and piped-in music, and seeing the personal grooming services—pedicures, hair styling, temporary tattoos—offered poolside, I became tense. Excursions took on the nature of a prison break. Indeed, a high point of the trip occurred when we loaded our bag of dirty laundry into the minivan and escaped to a laundromat, where we spent a happy hour eating Doritos and watching a TV that had been chained to the dryers.

Only when we got home did I realize that we had never ventured onto the famous beach. There is a town in Wisconsin that is apparently composed of nothing but water parks; we could have gone there for a tenth of the price. This thought discomfited me for a while, but as the weeks passed I began to indulge in something that academics who study vacations call "rosy retrospection." The photographs came back, and we all looked very jolly in them. I propped one up on my desk. It wasn't the most flattering shot of us, but the sea and the sky are the make-believe blue of a picture postcard, and it stirred something in me. We plan to return in March. ♦

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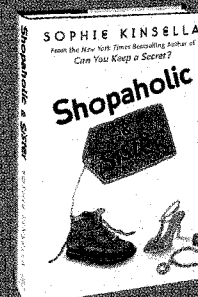
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AFTER ANGELS

Tony Kushner's Promethean itch.

BY JOHN LAHR

On May 2, 2004, the humid Sunday that his musical "Caroline, or Change" was to transfer from the Public Theatre, downtown, to the Eugene O'Neill Theatre, on Broadway, Tony Kushner left his apartment on the Upper West Side and ambled east through Central Park. He was seeking out Bethesda Fountain and the statue of an angel that graces it to ask for blessing. For luck, on opening nights, Kushner usually performs two rituals: before the curtain goes up he sings Cole Porter's "Begin the Beguine"—a song that, according to his will, must be played, along with Brahms's Fourth and Mahler's Resurrection Symphony, at his funeral ("I envision a lengthy service," he has written. "Bring lunch"); then, while the show is on, he slips away for a Chinese meal. On this occasion, however, Kushner found himself doubly in need of luck. Not only would the opening of "Caroline" mark his return to Broadway after more than a decade but a revised, nearly four-hour version of his play "Homebody/Kabul" was beginning a limited engagement at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Kushner had last been represented on Broadway in 1993, with "Perestroika," the second part of his seven-hour epic, "Angels in America." The first major play to put homosexual life at the center of its moral debate, "Angels" covered territory that ranged from Heaven to earth, from the AIDS epidemic to conservative politics, encapsulating, in its visionary sweep, the sense of confusion and longing that defined late-twentieth-century American life. "It gave a language to that generation," the director George C. Wolfe, who staged both "Angels in America" and "Caroline, or Change" on Broadway, says. "It gave playwrights permission to think about theatre in a whole new way. A play could be poetic, ridiculous, fragile, overtly political, sentimental, and brave all at the same time." "Angels" won Kushner two Tonys and a Pulitzer Prize. Last De-

cember, HBO aired Mike Nichols's sixty-million-dollar film version, for which Kushner adapted the play and which starred Al Pacino and Meryl Streep. (The film was nominated for twenty-one Emmys and won a record eleven.)

In Kushner's view, however, "Caroline, or Change"—a semi-autobiographical account of the relationship between a Southern Jewish boy, who has lost his mother, and his family's saturnine maid, Caroline—is his best-told story. Based on the "unexpected hidden life" of the Kushner family's maid, Maudie Lee Davis, the script is a radical departure from the standard forms of Broadway musical distraction. With its focus on race, class, and even economics, "Caroline" celebrates the ambivalent, instead of the upbeat. When it opened last year at the Public, it earned a strong critical response, not all of it positive. For some critics, the show's psychological subtlety was hidden beneath the folkloric, seemingly simplistic style of the production. ("Caroline" might be regarded as the brooding person's "Hairspray," Ben Brantley wrote in the *Times*.) Kushner felt, he says, "hugely disappointed" and only "cautiously, but definitely, endorsed."

Nevertheless, throughout the winter and into the spring, bolstered by the growing demand of the Public's audiences and by the success of the Nichols film, Kushner worked the phones and called in favors until a consortium of twenty Broadway producers put up five million dollars to move the musical to Broadway. No one was going to get rich, their mantra went, but Broadway would be the richer for it. The Broadway opening meant another round of reviews. "It would be lovely if suddenly there was sort of this Pauline conversion and people were coming and saying, 'I was wrong the first time; it's great now,'" Kushner said. "But that isn't going to happen. Tomorrow there'll be some wonderful things and also maybe some not-so-wonderful things. Then we have to take a deep

breath and figure out how we're going to give this a respectable run on Broadway." Kushner admits that he is "preternaturally, even *prenatally*, thin-skinned." He says, "I would like to care less about the things other people say about me, but I can't imagine caring less. I think people pay heavy prices for armor and callousness." Still, he adds, "it's very hard to take criticism when it's inept, when it kills the chances of that show being seen."

For a while, he sat on the low perimeter wall of the Bethesda plaza, enjoying the scene. His gaze finally came to rest on the blousy bronze angel in the center of the fountain, which plays an important role in the finale of "Angels in America." In the Biblical tale of Bethesda, an angel appears on the surface of a pool and gives the water healing powers. The statue, Kushner explained, "commemorates the naval dead of the Civil War. It's the first commissioned sculpture by a woman in New York—Emma Stebbins, the sister of the parks board president and a lesbian." He went on, "The other thing I love about it is that it got terrible reviews when it was unveiled."

Kushner is a purveyor of what he calls "brave art"—"the best sense we can make of our times." Several weeks before "Caroline" opened on Broadway, in a debate sponsored by the Classic Stage Company, one of Kushner's great champions, the critic Harold Bloom, spent the better part of two hours trying in vain to get Kushner to admit that he was a theological writer. "I'm somebody who believes in . . . a kind of relationship of complaint and struggle and pursuit between the human and the divine," Kushner said finally. "And part of that struggle involves politics. For me, drama without politics is inconceivable."

He is fond of quoting Melville's heroic prayer from "Mardi and a Voyage Thither" ("Better to sink in boundless deeps, than float on vulgar shoals"), and

DAVID LEVINE



In theatre, Kushner is a purveyor of "brave art," which he defines as "the best sense we can make of our times."

takes an almost carnal glee in tackling the most difficult subjects in contemporary history—among them, AIDS and the conservative counter-revolution (“Angels in America”), Afghanistan and the West (“Homebody/Kabul”), German Fascism and Reaganism (“A Bright Room Called Day”), the rise of capitalism (“Hydriotaphia, or the Death of Dr. Brown”), and racism and the civil-rights movement in the South (“Caroline, or Change”). But his plays, which are invariably political, are rarely polemical. Instead, Kushner rejects ideology in favor of what he calls “a dialectically shaped truth,” which must be “outrageously funny” and “absolutely agonizing,” and must “move us forward.” He gives voice to characters who have been rendered powerless by the forces of circumstance—a drag queen dying of AIDS, an uneducated Southern maid, contemporary Afghans—and his attempt to see all sides of their predicament has a sly subversiveness. He forces the audience to identify with the marginalized—a humanizing act of imagination.

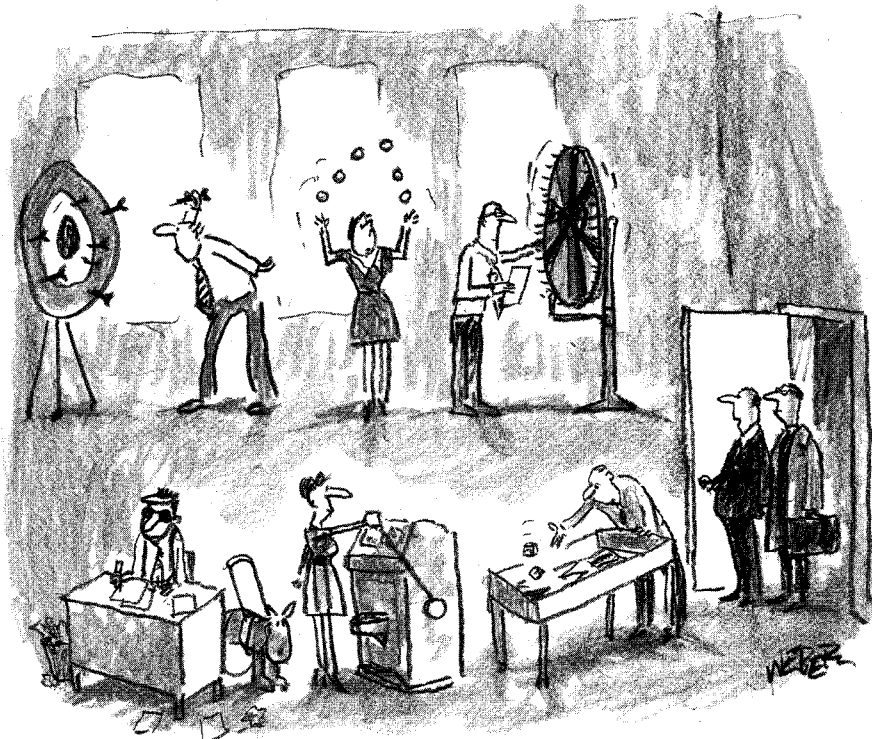
Kushner also has what he calls “a boundless appetite” for exploring the dramatic form. An early dance-theatre piece, “La Fin de la Baleine: An Opera for the Apocalypse”—about bad love, the blues, the bomb, and bulimia—included a woman dancing on point with a

tuba and spouting water from her mouth. “Homebody/Kabul,” which began with a first-person monologue, morphed into a third-person drama, moving unexpectedly from closeup to long shot. With its visions and poetic fulminations, “Angels in America” expanded the expressive limits of naturalistic theatre. Likewise, “Caroline, or Change” used its visual, sonic, and linguistic vernacular to create a kind of American folk opera, in which the worlds of white privilege and African-American impoverishment were woven together in a dreamlike fable that bore the influence of Kushner’s friend Maurice Sendak, with whom he has written a children’s book and an opera libretto.

Underneath Kushner’s prodigious flow of language is a sense of incantation, which draws the spectator in and compels him to listen. His writing is defined by fluency and excess. He wrote the first draft of the opening monologue for “Homebody/Kabul” in forty-eight hours, “Caroline” in four and a half months, and he had just finished a two-hundred-and-eighty-three-page draft of a screenplay for Steven Spielberg about the aftermath of the 1972 terrorist attack during the Olympic Games in Munich, which he wrote in three weeks. “I like big, splashy, juicy plays,” Kushner says. “I like the audience to feel space to roam around in.”

(He refers to Samuel Beckett as “that matzoh of a playwright.”) In his 1995 collection of essays, “Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness,” Kushner writes, “A good play, like good lasagna, should be overstuffed. It has a pomposity, and an over-reach. Its ambitions extend in the direction of not-missing-a-trick, it has a bursting omnipotence up its sleeve.”

The swashbuckling quality of Kushner’s intellectual aspirations is not borne out by his demeanor. At forty-eight, he is tall, courtly, unassuming, and flat-footed, with a tangle of wiry black curls—his “wackadoo hair,” as his friend the director Michael Mayer calls it. He is by nature a “fummfler”—what Sendak calls “the Jewish fumbler who is in perfect control, who uses his comic character to somehow make everyone feel comfortable and loose.” He talks extraordinarily fast, with a machine-gun-style delivery that reflects both his swiftness of mind and his nervousness. At the same time, his pace gives him a distinct comic advantage. When delivering the Class Day speech at Columbia University earlier this year, he reminded the students that he had been their fourth choice—after Warren Buffett, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Jon Stewart. “I think I should begin by acknowledging your disappointment that I am not Jon Stewart,” he said. “Your disappointment that I am not Jon Stewart will last one morning. I am disappointed at not being Jon Stewart every morning of my life.” To graduates at Bard, where he was awarded an honorary degree, he observed, “I cherish my bile duct as much as any other organ. I take good care of it. I make sure it gets its daily vitamins and antioxidants and invigorating exposure to news of Antonin Scalia and everyone else working for the Bush family.” At Cooper Union, receiving another degree, he began his speech by pronouncing President Bush’s words of the previous day: “Thank you and good evening. I’m honored to visit the Army War College. Generations of officers have come here to study the strategies and history of warfare. I’ve come here tonight to report to all Americans, and to the Iraqi people, on the strategy our nation is pursuing in Iraq and the specific steps we’re taking to achieve our goals.” He paused, then added, “I just wanted to feel what it felt like to say that.”



“And this is our department of experimental accounting.”

When Kushner speaks in public, his gambit is often to share with his audience a little secret, some complaint that downplays his own prestige: he's tired; he's nervous; he's unprepared; he's overworked; he doesn't know what to say. "He keeps dismantling himself, reminding himself of how weak he is and how many frailties he has," Nichols says. "He lets you see the vulnerability. It's part of a genius's self-protection."

"I don't look like Keanu Reeves," Kushner said in a 1994 interview. "So when people express an interest, which happens rarely but does . . . I sort of go, 'Well, why?'" Mayer says, "He's very disparaging about his chin, his nose, his weight. You don't imagine him lying on the beach in a bathing suit." Kushner is constantly at war with his body, alternately indulging and starving it. Between 1988 and 1993, when he was writing "Angels in America," he gained about a hundred pounds. "I used to say, 'I'm pregnant. I'm eating for eight,'" he says. Then, just as dramatically, he shrank himself down.

In 1969, when Kushner was twelve, his mother, Sylvia, learned that she had breast cancer. (After a long remission, she died of inoperable lung cancer, on August 27, 1990.) At one point, when she was in a hospital in New York, he badgered his father, William, to buy him a pocket watch, then had it engraved with the words "Cogito, Ergo Sum" (a motto he'd acquired from Marvel comic books, not Descartes). "A thinker or nothing," he explains. "Because the body, clearly, betrays."

William Kushner, a Southern Jew from Lake Charles, Louisiana, who had studied at Juilliard, had been playing first clarinet with the New Orleans Symphony when he met Sylvia Deutscher, who, as first bassoonist, was one of the first American women to hold a chair in a major orchestra. She had been a professional musician since she was twenty-three. In addition to touring with Sadler's Wells and playing with the New York City Opera, she had recorded with Stravinsky and played at the first Pablo Casals Festival. Kushner says of his mother's music, "That nasal but open-throated, deep wooden vibrato sound echoed through my childhood. I think the idea of fluency made itself felt in me as something musical before it became something

lingual. She had huge lung power. She could breathe into a candle flame and control the flicker of it with her breath." He also says, "She saved a good deal of her truthfulness, the things she couldn't say in the quotidian, for her music."

The youngest of four children from a first-generation socialist Jewish family in New York, Sylvia was noisy and emotional. Her father, an early member of the glazier's union, had been fierce and abusive. As a result, according to her sister, Martha Deutscher, Sylvia "was a needy person who was massively insecure about herself." Kushner's older sister, the artist Lesley Kushner, was born, in 1954, with severe hearing loss; she couldn't speak and couldn't easily comprehend what was said to her. Her frustration kept her in a more or less permanent tantrum. To spend more time with her

and Tony, William and Sylvia, then in their early thirties and playing for the New York City Opera, decided to move back to Lake Charles, where William could earn a living in his father's lumber business. But Sylvia felt isolated in the South. "Leaving music professionally was very difficult for her," William says. "She hadn't succeeded as an artist," Kushner explains. "There was a sense of the world having not gotten her, and not appreciated her. She was furious about it."

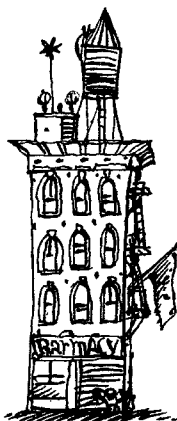
When Kushner was born, in 1956, he entered a family dominated by an atmosphere of regret, disappointment, and, in the case of his older sister, murderous rage. "There was just no way to tell her, no way to make her understand," William recalls of Lesley's rancor over the sudden appearance of her brother. She had to be physically removed from Kushner's third-birthday party; when her father drove her away from the house, she tried to throw herself out of the car. The brutality of her behavior was, William says, "pretty devastating" to Tony—"it gave him a great sympathy with other people who were mistreated." Until Kushner reached high school, he and Lesley were at war. Adding to the tension, according to Kushner, was the fact that Sylvia had different notions of femininity than Lesley, who was a tomboy. "She took you and kind of rejected me," Lesley wrote in a recent e-mail to Tony. "Or as she put it, 'My father

was an angry man and you were angry so I gave you to Daddy.'" A third child, Eric, who was born in 1961, absorbed his parents' professional ambitions. "They pushed Eric into music," Lesley says. "Every single week, they would drive him to New Orleans for horn lessons, four hours each way." (Eric is now first horn for the Vienna Symphony Orchestra.)

In 1969, Sylvia underwent a mastectomy, and nine years later William became the maestro of the Lake Charles Symphony—events that changed the family dynamic. While Lesley and Eric gravitated toward their father, Tony maintained the closest bond to Sylvia. From an early age, he'd been a fervent reader of comics—"I wanted to write books, to be an illustrator," he says. He made up his own stories for the comic characters and wrote

their dialogue. "Momma read them and would delight in them," Lesley recalls. "She thought they were funny. Everything he said she just found delightful." Tony was equally enchanted by his mother, who had theatrical aspirations. At six, he watched her perform in Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" at the local theatre-in-the-round. "As Linda Loman, she changed from my beautiful young mother . . . to an old woman in the course of the evening," he wrote in 1997. "It was terrifying and wonderful. . . . I don't think I ever saw her the same way again." Over the years, he watched Sylvia play Anne Frank's mother, and Beatrice in "The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds." "I really think that it was seeing those plays and the special sort of power that her being in them gave to them that started me on a lifelong fascination with the theatre," he has said.

Kushner has come to realize that William's love of writing—he and his family were great reciters of poetry and doggerel—was also an important influence on him. But, in his youth, what he got from his father was a sense of worry—the idea "that there was something wrong that he was trying to fix." As a boy, Kushner was not assertive or athletic. "I would become angry with Tony, frustrated with his helplessness," William says. "He wanted something from me that I wasn't giving him," Kushner recalls. William





"Why don't we just stay by this rock and take day trips around the local area?"

tried unsuccessfully to interest him in chess, ball games, bird-watching, sailing, and an Outward Bound course (they got as far as the orientation meeting). Around puberty, he began to give his son pep talks about sex. Kushner says, "As I got older, he figured it out. He finally said, 'I think you're a homosexual, and I want you not to be a homosexual. I want you to go to a therapist and fix it.' I was about sixteen."

Kushner had known that he was gay for almost a decade. He remembers rubbing the shoulders of his handsome Sunday-school teacher and thinking, Oh, this is fun, and also I shouldn't be doing this. Those impulses sent him through childhood with a sense of fraudulence. "You feel you are unacceptable to everyone, even to your parents, who love you but wouldn't if they knew," Kushner says. His persistent nightmare was of his classmates finding out "and killing me or burning the house down." His high-school friend Tom Tolin, an economist, says, "I remember him sitting in the bleachers and these guys around him giving him a hard time, calling him 'Kush-Kush.' He just sat there with his head buried in a book. It was painful." Kushner recalls, "I hated the kids that I was going to school with, the boys especially—aggressive, nasty, physically intimidating. I

didn't know how to get protection, because I was too embarrassed."

For years, Kushner was, by his own admission, a terrible student. Then, to his astonishment, in high school he became a verbal athlete: a champion debater. "I may have been a sissy, but I was not without aggression," he says. "I became this incredibly mean arguer. I would not be defeated." He was also opinionated: in high school, he refused to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance; he leafletted Ku Klux Klan members for George McGovern; as early as junior high school, he alone on his debate team argued in favor of feminism. But his talent gave him, for the first time, a sense of his own power and a society to which he belonged. "I found the smart kids," he says.

As Kushner was finding his lung power, his mother was losing hers. In 1969, following her mastectomy, she was overradiated and developed osteomyelitis in her ribs, some of which had to be removed. "She was in a lot of pain, couldn't laugh, couldn't be hugged, and, of course, she couldn't play the bassoon," Kushner says. Her ambition settled instead on Tony, whose Promethean itch had its origins in her aspirations for him. "It was this huge thing to her if I succeeded," he says. "I don't recall her ever lavishing a huge

amount of praise on me, but I remember the thrill in her voice when I told her I had won some debate tournament, or when I got an agent, or when I got a grant or a good review or any indication that what she expected—which was that I would be a successful artist—was going to come to pass. She would simply say, 'Go! Go! Go!' in a crescendo of pitch and volume, when I brought her good news." Speaking of the special connection between Sylvia and her children, Lesley says, "She kind of moved into your skin with you. You couldn't tell if it was what you wanted for yourself or what she wanted for you. It was a sort of ventriloquist sensation." When Kushner was accepted to the graduate program at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, Sylvia came to see him a couple of times a year. "She visited with him and nobody else," Martha Deutscher says. "It was always the two of them." Once, when Sylvia, Kushner, and Deutscher were having coffee in the Village, Kushner and his aunt began to tease his mother about some of her attitudes. "She turned to me and said, 'Don't you turn my son against me!'" Deutscher recalls. "She was not joking. She didn't want to share him."

When Kushner's play "A Bright Room Called Day" was staged in London in 1988, Sylvia flew over for the opening. It was panned. "She collapsed," Deutscher says. "When my mother died, I realized that a certain degree of my ability to take pleasure in my own accomplishments was gone," Kushner says. "Without her to show it to, to do it for—a circuit had been broken." Above his writing desk at his country house, in Manitou, New York, is a huge framed copy—signed by the poet—of Robert Duncan's "My Mother Would Be a Falconress," which reads, in part:

My mother would be a falconress,
and I her gervalcon, raised at her will,
from her wrist sent flying, as if I were her
own
pride, as if her pride
knew no limits, as if her mind
sought in me flight beyond the horizon.

Sexuality was one of the ways in which Kushner broke away from his mother and, like the poem's falcon, flew "far, far beyond the curb of her will." Kushner's parents had hoped that with therapy his latent heterosexuality could be reinforced. When he was twenty-five,

he called home to tell Sylvia that he was gay. "She cried for a month," he says. "She was just heartbroken by it. I finally said, 'I'm not going to call you anymore until you stop, because it's getting creepy. I feel like I've died.'"

Although he now refers to his "desire-based identity" and an "endlessly raging libido," he had difficulty, at first, accepting his orientation. In his second week as an undergraduate at Columbia, in 1974, Kushner presented himself at the health center and asked to see a therapist. "I'm gay and I want to be straight," he said. He is, he says, "sexually flusterable." "The first time I ever saw two men kiss was when I was a freshman at Columbia and it completely freaked me out," he said in an interview last year. "It still took another three years before I began to come out of the closet." When Kushner did come out, according to the actor Stephen Spinella—who met Kushner in graduate school at New York University, and later starred in "Angels in America"—"he exploded. It was like a train. He was out, out, out."

A decade later, in 1995, Kushner and Michael Mayer, who had also met as students at N.Y.U., found themselves, in the company of such celebrities as Roy Lichtenstein and Bob Hope, at the White House, during the first term of the Clinton Administration. Kushner was seated at Al Gore's table. "I wore a triangle made out of pink rhinestones. Gore asked me what it was and I got to explain it to him," Kushner recalls. After dinner, there was a dance. "We were slow-dancing together next to Senator Alan Simpson and his wife, the Gores, everyone," Mayer recalls. "We may be the first men ever to dance together in the White House."

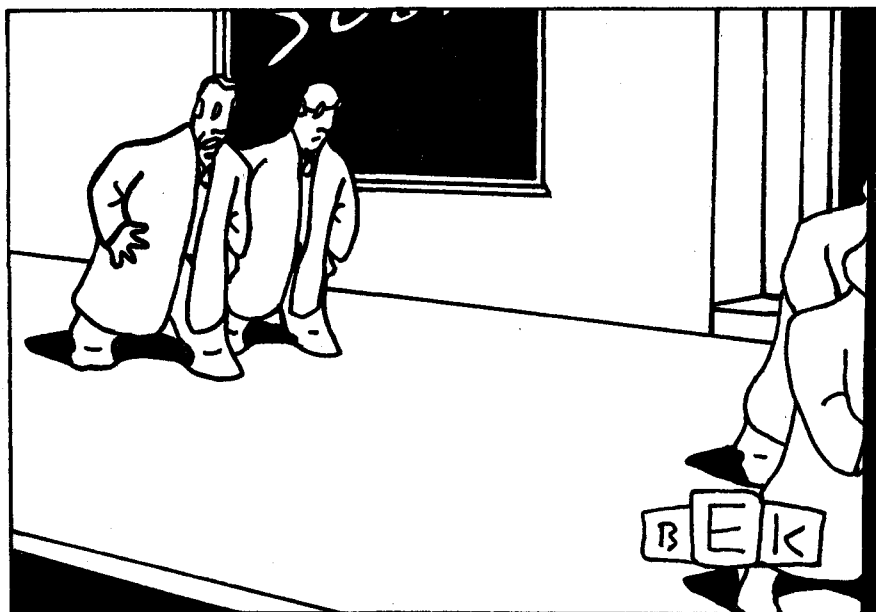
Kushner, in his senior year at Columbia, took Edward Tayler's famous course on Shakespeare. "Tayler taught Shakespeare in a profoundly dialectical way," Kushner says. To understand Shakespeare, Tayler told his students, "you only need to count to two." From him, Kushner learned that everything in Shakespeare was paradoxical and contradictory—and that this collision of opposites was the first principle of drama. He left Tayler's lecture on "Henry IV, Part 1" "shaking and in a fog." He recalls, "I was having trouble breathing. I felt like, Oh, I'm beginning to

understand something about life, the idea that a thing can be both one thing and its opposite, that two opposites can exist simultaneously and not cancel each other out. Or they can transform one another through conflict into something new." Kushner had already gravitated toward the stage. He had attended theatre and opera in New York, designed sets and props for university productions of "The Fantasticks" and "Marat/Sade," served for a year and a half as the drama critic of the Columbia *Spectator*, and written his first dialogue in a playwriting class. By the time he graduated, he had also fallen under the spell of Brecht's "A Short Organum for the Theatre," which set out the playwright's aesthetic for epic theatre—his attempt to engage the audience in a play of contradiction that encouraged active critical thought and departed from the passive emotional catharsis encouraged by the Aristotelian principles of drama. "I wanted to be Bertolt Brecht," Kushner says. He applied to N.Y.U., and, once there, studied under the German-born director Carl Weber, a Brecht specialist.

In his senior year at Columbia, while directing a university production of Ben Jonson's sprawling epic "Bartholomew Fair," Kushner had become friends with Kimberly Flynn, a Barnard psychology major from New Orleans, who was working on the stage crew. "We fit together intellectually and, in some ways, emotionally, on a kind of molecular level," he says. Kushner and Flynn went every-

where together; they had no secrets. Flynn had, Kushner says, a "vast appetite for pedagogy—she loves explaining things to people" and was "a great synthesizer." Kushner, in turn, had a vast curiosity. "She led and I followed," he says. "She read Walter Benjamin and told me I should. And Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer. I had read some Freud and some Marx, but not nearly as widely." He continues, "As soon as I started writing, or constructing plays, she would read, comment, make suggestions. I would call her my dramaturge, but Kim was that to the power of twenty." Inevitably, though, there were struggles over ownership of ideas. In 1982, Kushner formed a theatre company with several people, including Flynn and his first boyfriend, Mark Bronnenberg, to produce "La Fin de la Baleine," among other plays. Flynn contributed the ideas; Kushner created the stage images, and got most of the credit for the show, which caused some bad feeling between the friends.

In 1984, Flynn was riding in a cab as it sped up the West Side Highway when the car went out of control and off the road, ramming into a tree in Riverside Park. During the next few days at the hospital, Flynn's garbled sentences, her repetitions, and her inability to distinguish left from right indicated to her, even before the doctors confirmed it, that she had suffered brain damage. Just as Kushner's theatrical career was taking off—he was appointed the assistant director of the St. Louis



"I just get a little tense before everything."

Repertory Theatre in 1985, and became the associate artistic director of the New York Theatre Workshop in 1987—Flynn was stymied, and she directed some of her enormous fury at Kushner. She told *The New Yorker*, “It was hard to deal with how angry I was, and with the idea that I was jealous and that I was in no position to be jealous—I was out of the game.” Kushner agonized over moving to St. Louis. “I’ve had to make the hardest decisions of my life around Kim’s illness,” he has said. His guilt about her disaster and the difficulty of taking care of her is evident in “Millennium Approaches,” the first part of “Angels in America.” “She was everywhere in it,” he says. (He gave Flynn ten per cent of the profits.)

Flynn eventually recovered sufficiently to become a full-time political activist, focussing on environmental issues. But in 1996, right before Kushner began work on “Homebody” and “Caroline,” he and Flynn decided to alter the nature of their friendship. “We tried very hard to figure out a way of staying close,” he says. “We were just making each other, by the end, terribly, terribly unhappy.” He continues, “It was an important turning point for me.” In his cramped one-room office in Union Square, Kushner keeps a photograph of himself with Flynn at Bethesda Fountain.

Kushner’s “A Bright Room Called Day,” which is dedicated, in part, to Flynn, crosscut the effect of the rise of Hitler on a group of friends in Berlin in the early thirties with a rant on American politics that linked Fascism with the Reagan revolution. It was meant, Kushner says, as “a warning signal, not a prediction.” The play, which was workshopped in New York in 1985, drew little press attention, but the director Oskar Eustis saw one of the performances. “Tony’s gift for language was completely apparent,” he says. “He was deeply, specifically interested in politics, in political theory and how it related to political practice.” He goes on, “‘Bright Room’ was about what all Tony’s plays are about—people who feel themselves inadequate for the demands that history has put on them.”

Eustis produced and directed “Bright Room” in 1987 at San Francisco’s Eureka Theatre, where it had a succès d’estime. But East Coast critics were less enthusiastic when they saw a reworked version in

1991 at the Public Theatre in New York. “A fatuous new drama,” Frank Rich called it in the *Times*. “An early front-runner for the most infuriating play of 1991.” For all its intelligence and ambition, the play was dramatically inert. “I made an outline of twenty-four scenes,” Kushner says. “I wrote twenty-four scenes. Each scene was exactly what I put down in the outline.” Eustis says, “Tony understood everything else about theatre, but he didn’t understand about reversals, how that worked. The theatre is about change, so change has to happen in the course of the play. In ‘Bright Room,’ you’d have scene after scene of characters coming out, beautifully expressing how they feel, then leaving the stage without changing at all.”

After the San Francisco run ended, Kushner began work on what he envisioned as a taut, one-set musical about AIDS. As he started to write for the first time about his own time and place—about homosexuality, AIDS, and right-wing American politics—the play quickly began to exceed his ambitions for it. “For the first-rate artist, there is a moment when he’s really getting revved up, and the time just flows into him,” Mike Nichols says. “It only happens once. It happens without his awareness at all. He planned nothing. He was just going ahead doing this next thing.”

As Kushner was writing “Angels in America,” he gave himself to the characters, not to the outline; instead of imposing an ideology on them, he followed their lead. “I was two acts into ‘Millennium’ and I didn’t know what the fuck I was doing,” he says. “So I thought, I’m gonna ask a character. Who’s most like me? Louis. So I sat down, and I said, ‘What is this play about?’ I waited a few minutes and then ‘Why has democracy succeeded in America?’ popped into my head. Then Louis began to qualify himself, as he always did—the first of my big logorrheics. I wrote the line ‘There are no angels in America.’ Then I wrote on the side to myself, ‘Louis is wrong.’” The story seemed to suggest itself from there. Still, the writing wasn’t easy for Kush-

ner. “I can’t get these people to change fast enough,” he complained to Eustis. “At first, I thought he was being self-indulgent,” Eustis says. “What became clear is that the difficulty in these people changing *was* the subject of the play.”

What eventually emerged was an epic discourse on American life that mixed social reality with theatrical fantasy, naturalism with Judaism and magical realism. It told its story in numerous dialects—camp, black, Jewish, WASP, even Biblical tones. At the same time, it provided a detailed map of the nation’s sense of loss. “Millennium Approaches” charts the heyday of the Reagan Presidency through a series of characters who ruthlessly pursue their own sexual and public destinies: Prior Walter, an AIDS patient, is abandoned by his lover, Louis, at the time of his most profound need; Joe, an ambitious bisexual Mormon Republican chief clerk, leaves his lost, pill-popping wife, Harper, for a man; and Roy Cohn, the notorious right-wing lawyer and fixer, a closeted homosexual who is also dying of AIDS, rationalizes his own sensational rapacity. (Cohn, whom Kushner portrayed with Jacobean relish, personifies the barbarity of individualism.) In “Perestroika,” which ends four years after “Millennium,” in 1990, Kushner explores the possibility of progress and community, of redemption. Harper finally accepts the failure of her marriage and sets out on her own. Louis reconciles with Prior—in a scene that took Kushner years to write. “Failing in love isn’t the same as not loving,” Louis says. “It doesn’t let you off the hook, it doesn’t mean . . . you’re free to not love.”

Twenty-four characters, eight acts, fifty-nine scenes, and an epilogue: “Angels in America” turned the struggle of a minority into a metaphor for America’s search for self-definition. “I hate this country,” a gay black nurse called Belize says to Louis. “It’s just big ideas, and stories, and people dying, and people like you. The white cracker who wrote the national anthem knew what he was doing. He set the word ‘free’ to a note so high nobody can reach it.” Although “Angels” was not the first play to explore the AIDS pandemic—Larry Kramer’s polemical “The Normal Heart” (1985) preceded it—it was the first to explore the particular claim of the disenfranchised to a romantic vision of America. “We will be citizens,” Prior announces to the audi-





"Can I have a pony?"

ence at the finale. "The time has come."

By the fall of 1988, it had become clear that the play would need two evenings to run its course, which meant that Eustis couldn't afford to produce it at the Eureka Theatre. "A two-evening show about AIDS by a playwright nobody had heard of. I mean, it was just disastrous," Eustis says. In the end, he chose the play over his theatre company. He left the Eureka for the Mark Taper Forum, in Los Angeles, where the artistic director, Gordon Davidson, had agreed to workshop "Millennium" and, eventually, to mount both halves of the play together under Eustis's directorship. The plan took a few years to complete. It wasn't until the spring of 1991, almost a year after Kushner's mother had died, that he was able to wrench the three-hundred-page draft of "Perestroika" out of himself—in an eight-day writing spree in a cabin on the Russian River, in Northern California, where he holed up with a box full of junk food and cold cuts. "I would sleep two hours at a stretch, get up, write the next scene, and it just went on and on," he says. He finished the play on April 11th. "It was maybe one of the

happiest days of my entire life," he says.

"Millennium" had its first major production in Declan Donnellan's version at London's Royal National Theatre, in January, 1992. After a workshop of "Perestroika" at the Taper in May of that year, both parts of the play were performed together for the first time, over two nights, in November. By then, "Millennium" had won the London *Evening Standard's* award for best play. When the Mark Taper box office opened for the complete production of "Angels," the receipts broke the theatre's record. At the Taper premiere, most of New York's theatrical establishment and its major critics were in the audience. Backstage, Kushner wrote a letter to the cast and pinned it on the bulletin board. "And how else should an angel land on earth but with the utmost difficulty?" it said. "If we are to be visited by angels we will have to call them down with sweat and strain, we will have to drag them out of the skies."

The plays, if not the Taper production, were triumphant. "Angels" was hailed as a turning point for theatre, for gay life, and for American culture. Frank Rich, in the

Times, spoke of "Angels" as "this vast, miraculous play," and *Variety* went even further: "Angels in America" is a monumental achievement, the work of a defiantly theatrical imagination." In Charlotte, North Carolina—and in university towns in rural parts of Indiana and Texas—fundamentalists staged protests to stop subsequent local productions, a move that Kushner referred to in *The Nation* as "unconstitutional, undemocratic and deeply unwise." (A decade later, when the Nichols film aired on television, the climate of tolerance that "Angels" helped to create was used as a criticism of the play. When Kushner begins writing, he jokes about needing to banish his "inner John Simon," the voice of the acerbic theatre critic of *New York*, whom he imagines saying, "You're completely terrible and everything you write is shit." But Simon's attacks—real or imagined—are nothing compared with the grapeshot vitriol of Lee Seigel in *The New Republic*. "Angels in America" is a second-rate play written by a second-rate playwright who happens to be gay, and because he has written a play about being gay, and about AIDS, no one—and I mean

no one—is going to call ‘Angels in America’ the overwrought, coarse, posturing, formulaic mess that it is,” Seigel wrote.)

After “Angels in America,” Kushner found it hard to start another play. Nonetheless, he wanted to be useful. He thought about training to be a teacher, a lawyer, a nurse. Instead, according to Eustis, “he reinvented himself as a public intellectual,” becoming, among other things, one of America’s most prominent gay-rights activists. His essays—some of which began as speeches delivered at gay-rights events—addressed sex, homosexual liberation, and socialism. He argued in defense of the activist and playwright Larry Kramer; of the controversial choreographer Bill T. Jones; and of Matthew Shepard, the Wyoming student who was murdered because of his sexuality. “Campaign for homosexual and all civil rights—campaign, not just passively support,” Kushner exhorted the readers of his article on Shepard, which appeared in *The Nation* in 1998. “Matthew Shepard shouldn’t have died. We should all burn with shame.”

In 1995, Kushner was asked by President Clinton to submit some ideas for the forthcoming State of the Union address. In a letter, Kushner set out the tenets of his version of American democracy: “You need to be the full-blooded liberal Democrat I believe you want to be. You need to tell the American people that you stand for a strong Federal government, fully empowered to regulate industry, protect the jobs and lives of American workers, and protect our *extremely* endangered environment (and our health along with it). You have to declare war on the anti-tax, anti-government movement, calling it what it is: a scam perpetrated against the middle class, the working class and the poor in the interests of maximizing profits for multinational corporations and the very rich. . . . You have to have the courage you had in 1992 to declare that grown-up responsible citizens of a democracy *pay taxes*.” He ended his eight-page letter with a plea for social justice: “You must support affirmative action, poverty, education, child care and jobs creation programs, and anti-discrimination legislation which *includes sexual orientation*.” (Clinton read the letter, but nothing from it made it into the speech.)

These days, when Kushner visits college campuses, where he can command

more than twelve thousand dollars a talk, he is the equivalent of a rock star. (Once when he spoke at Brown, loudspeakers had to be placed outside the hall for the overflow audience; last April, at Middlebury, in the school’s auditorium, he spoke to a standing-room-only crowd.) Still, Kushner is a playwright who is an activist, not an activist who happens to write plays. One of the few serious playwrights who know how to write a joke, he is also one of the few political speakers who know how to deliver one. “When Republicans are upset, they fall over. Have you noticed this?” he asked Cooper Union’s graduating class last June, before pointing out that Nixon had tripped at a New Orleans trade show, Gerald Ford often fell down stairs, Bush senior had fallen and then vomited on the Japanese Prime Minister (“And he was the Bush who was *good* at foreign relations!”), and Bush junior had collapsed while eating a pretzel. “What are they expressing, these falling people?” he asked. “A spiritual vertigo? The insupportable weight of all the power and ponderous wealth they have arrogated



CRUELTY (Vermont, 1965)

That was the year my friends were reading Antonin Artaud and Jean Genet. The idea of cruelty felt important, like being so perfect an outlaw you became a saint. The war was on, muffled, distant. Where we were everything happened a few years later than it did in New York or San Francisco. Some would say it was too easy for us to be there, talking about almost anything. Too easy now to say we didn’t have a clue. I made it through the first few chapters of Artaud, and never got to “Saint Genet,” although I remember the cover clearly, the dome of his head, his eyes, the stare

unto themselves, beneath which their legs eventually buckle? . . . Is it an unseemly yet uncontrollable desire to slither?”

The apotheosis of Kushner’s kvetching persona was his appearance, in robe and slippers, at a fund-raising event for Friends in Deed, a charity that provides support for people with life-threatening diseases. Declaiming at a panic-stricken Gilbert-and-Sullivan clip, he read from his “diary”:

Wednesday, August 28, 2002. Mike Nichols called today. He wants a favor: Could I write a funny ten-minute play for a benefit for some group he’s on the board of, Friends of something-or-other. I love Mike. I would do anything for him. There’s no one I admire or adore more in the whole industry, maybe in the whole world. He’s really a great man, so busy and yet has the time to organize something like this. Wow! Me sharing the stage with six other incredibly intimidating playwrights of whom I am insanely jealous. Sounds like fun! I’m sure Mike doesn’t love Robbie Baitz more than me.

“Two people alone on an empty stage for ten minutes.” They can’t mean a literally empty stage. Props and costumes, surely. And sets. Maybe five people. Would anyone complain if mine was fifteen minutes long? And does it have to be funny? Funny is hard. I wonder if we get paid for this. . . .

Friday, October 25, 2002. I have a cold. I think I’m gaining weight again. I wish Mike had never asked me. I can’t write. . . . Why did Mike ask me? Maybe he was mad at me. Maybe he’s resentful that he’s been stuck filming my play since before the first Bush administration and he’s doing this to humiliate me. I bet he wishes he could call Nora Ephron in for rewrites. . . . My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? STEVE MARTIN is writing one! I’m doomed! It’s not a competition. It’s not a competition. . . .

that claimed he knew something
 I would never know. My friends
 moved on to de Sade. And now
 it occurs to me that during all those years
 I never said "I love you" to anyone,
 although I probably should have lied
 at least twice, to see if it was a lie.
 Meanwhile, the fields and mountains promised
 to remain the same, and they didn't.
 Great poems told us that nature
 would never betray us, but that
 really wasn't the point, was it?
 And then the theatre of cruelty
 stopped being shocking.
 We all knew why.

—Lawrence Raab

Tuesday, November 5, 2002. I couldn't write today, I had to go vote. I am optimistic, no matter what the polls say. Tomorrow, WITHOUT FAIL, I will write this play. . . . I will be in a good mood after the election. It'll be easier to write then.

Wednesday, November 6, 2002. I wish I was dead. . . .

Wednesday, November 13, 2002. . . . Something will come. ANYTHING. Who cares? It's a benefit, for God's sake! They took my name off the goddam ad! . . .

Thursday, November 14, 2002. Mike just nixed my idea: a Nichols and May reunion. "Two people alone on an empty stage," that's what he said. And then he refuses to cooperate! He's ruined everything. Thanks a LOT, Mike. Schmuck! See if I ever do you a favor again!

If Kushner's laughter is combustible, so, in certain theatrical circumstances, is his temper. Eustis recalls, "One time, after seeing a run-through of 'The Illusion'—Kushner's 1989 adaptation of Corneille's comedy and his first commercial success—he called me from his apartment after he'd destroyed every piece of furniture." He adds, "There was one particular moment where Tony told me that it was a mistake for me to ever have directed and I should give up the field. That was devastating. I can't tell you how many directors he's tried to get fired at crucial moments in the process." Although Eustis didn't finish the job on "Angels," Kushner has worked hard to make sure that their relationship didn't end there and he now pays Eustis to dramaturge his plays. "I

still consider Oskar one of my most important collaborators," Kushner says. "I spend hours with him weekly when I'm writing, talking about what I'm doing. I send him everything I write."

For Broadway, George Wolfe was brought in to energize the production of "Angels." "Tony is nothing if not intrusive," Wolfe says. "He completely trusts me, but I think, ultimately, he'd prefer to do it himself." Wolfe admits to occasionally burning Kushner's extensive and fevered production notes, "because I get so hostile about some of the things he writes." As a play gets closer to previews, according to Wolfe, "his mind, not having a lot to do, starts to obsess about everybody else's work. He starts to spin his wheels. Now, the first time you encounter the spinning of the wheels you try to go inside and figure out every single spoke of the wheel. Then, over time, you go, 'Madness, madness, madness, madness, oh, really strong truth. Let me hold on to that.' You have to reach inside the hurricane and pull out that beautiful little baby." Kushner is quite aware that Wolfe thinks he's a few sandwiches short of a picnic. "He doesn't think I'm insane, just a very neurotic person," Kushner says. "We were at dinner somewhere, and he looked at a bouquet of beautiful flowers. 'This is what you're like,' he said, and snapped off one of the smallest flowers. 'Oh, now the whole thing is completely ruined.'"

Kushner's intrusiveness was so perva-

sive that, while "Caroline, or Change" was in rehearsals, Wolfe and the company made a legend of it. They were working in the large, high-ceilinged Martinson auditorium at the Public Theatre—where a roof window looks down on the stage—when a pebble fell down onto the floor. Wolfe joked, "Tony's hiding up there. Jeanine"—Jeanine Tesori, who wrote the music for "Caroline"—"takes food up there so he can eat while watching us 'destroying' his piece."

Taking issue with Kushner is not easy. "It's like standing in front of a Mack truck," Tesori says. A few days before the show was to open on Broadway, she and Kushner still hadn't fine-tuned the epilogue. Wolfe insisted that he needed the scene the following night. Sitting at a table in her studio, Tesori said to Kushner, "It's too long."

"No, it's not," he replied. "Sometimes you need length. 'Angels' is full of places that shouldn't work but do, and they're long."

"I don't care what worked in that," Tesori said. "That's not this. It's too long."

"Well, we're just gonna have to agree to disagree."

"Well, we're just gonna have to stare at each other till one of us does something," Tesori said.

For ten minutes or so, Kushner and Tesori stared at each other in silence.

"Finally, he conceded, 'Well, maybe we can move the first line?'" Tesori recalls. "I said, 'Maybe we could.' Then he started shifting."

In May, Kushner broke his usual pattern and agreed to attend the Broadway opening of "Caroline," along with Mark Harris, his partner of six years, whom he married in a ceremony on April 27, 2003. (They were the first same-sex couple to have their wedding announced in the "Vows" column of the *Sunday Times*.) By the time the couple took their seats at the Eugene O'Neill—they were in Row T of the orchestra, the seats farthest from the stage—they had already consumed their lucky sesame noodles and dumplings and Kushner had successfully sung "Begin the Beguine." The lights went down, and Kushner leaned forward, with his chin in his hands, to watch as the reimagined drab basement of his childhood home came into view and Caroline, played by Tonya Pinkins, entered

with an armful of laundry to broadcast the mood of the brooding household:

Nothing ever happen underground
In Louisiana
'Cause they ain't no underground
In Louisiana
There is only
Underwater.

When the show was over, the audience, including Kushner, stood and cheered. Then he slipped into the aisle, where he, Tesori, and Wolfe, with their arms around each other and their heads touching, jumped up and down in a huddle. A few minutes later, for the first time on an opening night, Kushner took a bow from the stage. He made a dismissive flourish to the crowd with his left hand, then disappeared into the back row of the cast. Afterward, when the rehearsal light was up and only a few people lingered in the orchestra, Kushner looked at the ropes and winches and out at the empty auditorium. "Western civilization can't have been so terrible if it made a machine like this," he said. "It really is a great gadget."

The joy of the opening dissipated in the following weeks under the pressure of the awards season, which was likely to decide the commercial future of the show. The prospect of competing in the musicals category rattled Kushner, who saw "Caroline" as "more like a play." In an e-mail, he wrote, "'Caroline' has as much in common with the shows it's up against, some of which I really like, as marquetry has to do with Olympic tobogganing. It makes me nuts." In the end, "Caroline" won only one Tony, losing the awards for best musical and for best book to "Avenue Q," a jaunty show with puppets. But by the time "Caroline" got its closing notice, in mid-July—its final Broadway performance was on August 29th—Kushner had fought his way through the gloom. "I'm devastated but fine," he said. "I can't join in with the general lamentation over the wretched state of Broadway, which has never really been in any other kind of state." ("Caroline," at least, has had a second life at the Ahmanson Theatre, in Los Angeles, and will open this month in San Francisco.)

On a hazy afternoon in late June, Kushner and I drove to his country place in Manitou, in the Hudson Valley, a two-story house, with forest-green shingles and a red door, shaded on all sides

by towering maples and oaks. Through the sloping trees, the river was visible. Amtrak's Hudson Line hugged the shore, and every twenty minutes or so a train hurtled by, blaring its presence. Kushner barely registered the sound. "I always write best here," he said. "It reminds me of Louisiana, in that it's so verdant." He went on, "Inside me, it's like a fist unclenching."

For Kushner, the house has other happy associations. When he found it, six years ago, he had been ready to renounce New York altogether. "I thought, Fuck this," he says. "I'm just giving up on men. It hasn't happened. It's not going to happen. I'll give up and move out of the city." Kushner closed on the house in March of 1998; on April 16th of that year, at a party given by Michael Mayer, he met Harris, a droll and intelligent man, seven years his junior, and an editor at large at *Entertainment Weekly*. "Tony had this lovely combination of brazen confidence, enthusiasm, and huge insecurity that I found appealing," Harris recalls. A few days later, Kushner invited Harris to dinner at his place and prepared about five pounds of pasta. "This was so Tony," Harris says. "It was like a cauldron the size of a chemical-waste container on his stove. He bought a focaccia the size of a tire. He'd made a salad that could comfortably feed ten. I was completely terrified. 'This guy is gonna think I hate his food because he's given me a week's worth.'"

Kushner stayed in the city, but Manitou is still his favorite retreat. In his house, he has gathered pictures of Sylvia and her bassoon and of William and his clarinet, as well as the last photograph taken of his maternal great-grandparents in Vilnius before the Holocaust. Even the light fixtures outside his front door carry a memory of the past—they are from Temple Sinai, his childhood synagogue, in Lake Charles. Above his desk, in a cabin at the bottom of the garden, where he goes to write, hangs a photograph of Tennessee Williams, smiling over a bottle of wine. Harold Bloom told Kushner recently that Williams "is your most distinguished ancestor in the American drama and one who I think you'll wind up rivalling." The two playwrights share, at least, a belief that struggle is the natural order of things. "I'm deeply aware of what developmental psychologists call 'opti-

mal frustration,'" Kushner says. "The way children learn is that the task they have in front of them is always a little too difficult and forces a degree of concentrated angry attention. It should be a struggle. It's fun to struggle. We're born to it."

Just as he was leaving Manitou, Kushner got a call from a distraught Larry Kramer, whose play "The Normal Heart," recently revived at the Public, had failed to find Broadway backing. Kramer was calling to say that the producers were closing the show that night. Kushner paced the driveway, commiserating, and they agreed to lament together over dinner. "We'll meet up and set ourselves on fire," he said.

A couple of weeks later, Kushner was back at work, mixing his activism with his art. For a MoveOn.org fundraiser last summer, he went back to "Only We Who Guard the Mystery Shall Be Unhappy," a play-in-progress that depicts Laura Bush attending an after-school reading program for dead Iraqi children. For the event, he added a second scene, in which the First Lady, an admirer of Dostoyevsky's writing, comes onstage to debate the play's literary merits with the playwright himself. Since the first scene was published in *The Nation*—the first play that the magazine has printed in its hundred-and-thirty-nine-year history—Patricia Clarkson, Marcia Gay Harden, and Vanessa Redgrave have all played the role of Laura Bush, who was invited to read the part herself. (Her office did not respond.)

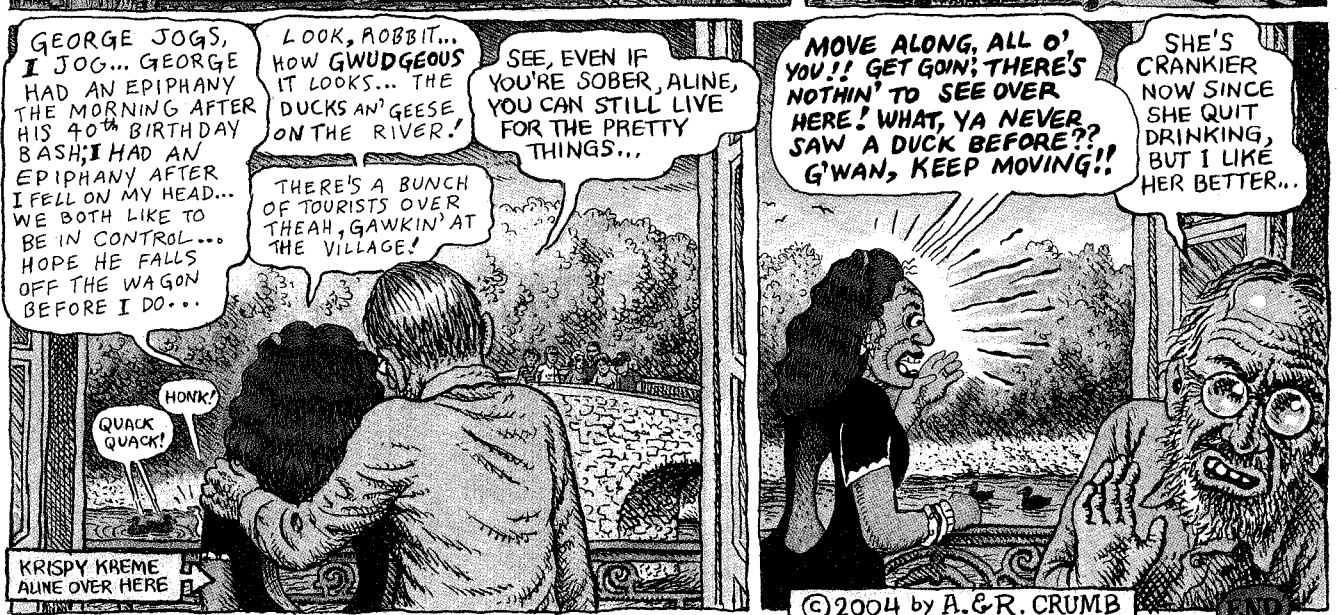
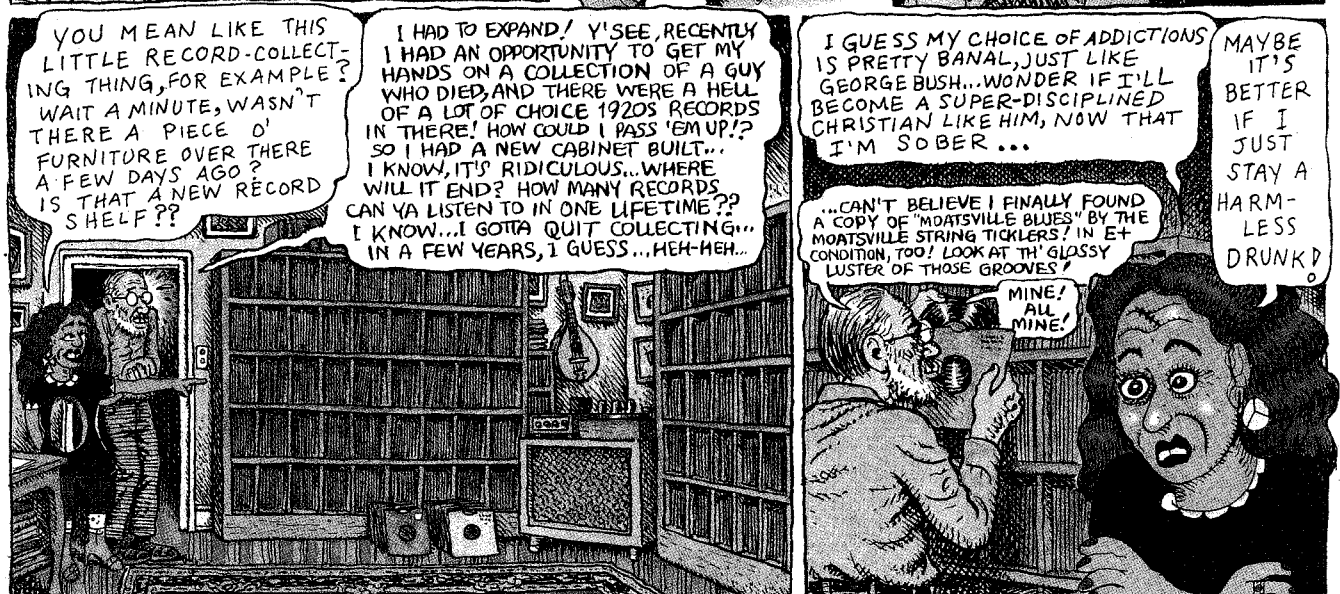
Kushner likes to collect amusing tidbits about political figures. According to his research, Supreme Court Justice William Rehnquist has led judges and lawyers in sing-alongs of "Dixie"; Judge Jay S. Bybee, who wrote a controversial memo justifying torture, plays in an all-kazoo orchestra; and President Bush refers to the First Lady as "my lump in the bed." In the new scene of "Only We Who Guard," Kushner, in full "fummle," brings this up. "So I guess my point is that we're all like you," his character says to Laura Bush. "That we're all being fucked by your husband." The First Lady takes umbrage and gets up to leave. As a parting shot, she scolds Kushner. "Using the stage, the theatre, ART! For, for tawdry propagandizing? You oughta be ashamed of yourself," she says.

"I always am," Kushner replies. ♦

Aline & Bob on HUMAN DEPRAVITY or ME and GEORGE







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END

THE DICTIONARY OF DISORDER

How one man revolutionized psychiatry.

BY ALIX SPIEGEL

In the mid-nineteen-forties, Robert Spitzer, a mathematically minded boy of fifteen, began weekly sessions of Reichian psychotherapy. Wilhelm Reich was an Austrian psychoanalyst and a student of Sigmund Freud who, among other things, had marketed a device that he called the orgone accumulator—an iron appliance, the size of a telephone booth, that he claimed could both enhance sexual powers and cure cancer. Spitzer had asked his parents for permission to try Reichian analysis, but his parents had refused—they thought it was a sham—and so he decided to go to the sessions in secret. He paid five dollars a week to a therapist on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, a young man willing to talk frankly about the single most compelling issue Spitzer had yet encountered: women. Spitzer found this methodical approach to the enigma of attraction both soothing and invigorating. The real draw of the therapy, however, was that it greatly reduced Spitzer's anxieties about his troubled family life: his mother was a "professional patient" who cried continuously, and his father was cold and remote. Spitzer, unfortunately, had inherited his mother's unruly inner life and his father's repressed affect; though he often found himself overpowered by emotion, he was somehow unable to express his feelings. The sessions helped him, as he says, "become alive," and he always looked back on them with fondness. It was this experience that confirmed what would become his guiding principle: the best way to master the wilderness of emotion was through systematic study and analysis.

Robert Spitzer isn't widely known outside the field of mental health, but he is, without question, one of the most influential psychiatrists of the twentieth century. It was Spitzer who took the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*—the official listing of all mental diseases recognized by the American Psychiatric Association (A.P.A.)—and

established it as a scientific instrument of enormous power. Because insurance companies now require a *DSM* diagnosis for reimbursement, the manual is mandatory for any mental-health professional seeking compensation. It's also used by the court system to help determine insanity, by social-services agencies, schools, prisons, governments, and, occasionally, as a plot device on "The Sopranos." This magnitude of cultural authority, however, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Although the *DSM* was first published in 1952 and a second edition (*DSM-II*) came out in 1968, early versions of the document were largely ignored. Spitzer began work on the third version (*DSM-III*) in 1974, when the manual was a spiral-bound paperback of a hundred and fifty pages. It provided cursory descriptions of about a hundred mental disorders, and was sold primarily to large state mental institutions, for three dollars and fifty cents. Under Spitzer's direction—which lasted through the *DSM-III*, published in 1980, and the *DSM-III-R* ("R" for "revision"), published in 1987—both the girth of the *DSM* and its stature substantially increased. It is now nine hundred pages, defines close to three hundred mental illnesses, and sells hundreds of thousands of copies, at eighty-three dollars each. But a mere description of the physical evolution of the *DSM* doesn't fully capture what Spitzer was able to accomplish. In the course of defining more than a hundred mental diseases, he not only revolutionized the practice of psychiatry but also gave people all over the United States a new language with which to interpret their daily experiences and tame the anarchy of their emotional lives.

The Biometrics Department of the New York State Psychiatric Institute at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center is situated in an imposing neo-Gothic building on West 168th Street. I

met Spitzer in the lobby, a sparsely decorated and strangely silent place that doesn't seem to get much use. Spitzer, a tall, thin man with well-cut clothes and a light step, was brought up on the Upper West Side. He is in his seventies but seems much younger; his graying hair is dyed a deep shade of brown. He has worked at Columbia for more than forty years, and his office is filled with the debris of decades. Calligraphed certificates with seals of red and gold cover the walls, and his desk is overwhelmed by paper.

Spitzer first came to the university as a resident and student at the Columbia Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research, after graduating from N.Y.U. School of Medicine in 1957. He had had a brilliant medical-school career, publishing in professional journals a series of well-received papers about childhood schizophrenia and reading disabilities. He had also established himself outside the academy, by helping to discredit his erstwhile hero Reich. In addition to his weekly sessions on the Lower East Side, the teen-age Spitzer had persuaded another Reichian doctor to give him free access to an orgone accumulator, and he spent many hours sitting hopefully on the booth's tiny stool, absorbing healing orgone energy, to no obvious avail. In time, he became disillusioned, and in college he wrote a paper critical of the therapy, which was consulted by the Food and Drug Administration when they later prosecuted Reich for fraud.

At Columbia Psychoanalytic, however, Spitzer's career faltered. Psychoanalysis was too abstract, too theoretical, and somehow his patients rarely seemed to improve. "I was always unsure that I was being helpful, and I was uncomfortable with not knowing what to do with their messiness," he told me. "I don't think I was uncomfortable listening and empathizing—I just didn't know what the hell to do." Spitzer managed to grad-



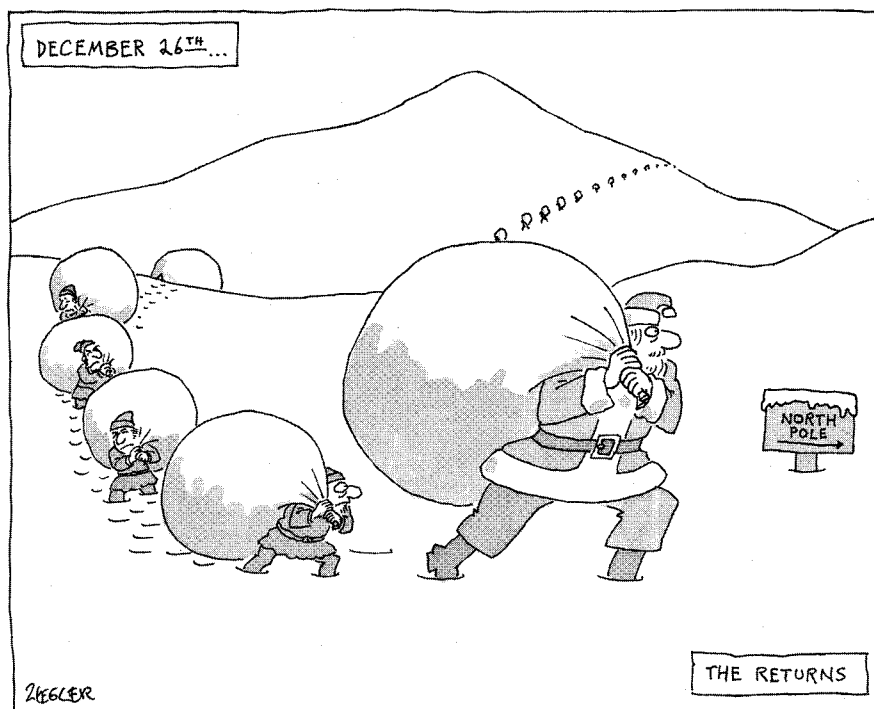
In the nineteen-sixties, psychiatry was in a crisis: doctors couldn't seem to agree on who was sick and what ailed them.

uate, and secured a position as an instructor in the psychiatry department (he has held some version of the job ever since), but he is a man of tremendous drive and ambition—also a devoted contrarian—and he found teaching intellectually limiting. For satisfaction, he turned to research. He worked on depression and on diagnostic interview techniques, but neither line of inquiry produced the radical innovation or epic discovery that he would need to make his name.

As Spitzer struggled to find his professional footing in the nineteen-sixties,

the still young field of psychiatry was also in crisis. The central issue involved the problem of diagnosis: psychiatrists couldn't seem to agree on who was sick and what ailed them. A patient identified as a textbook hysteric by one psychiatrist might easily be classified as a hypochondriac depressive by another. Blame for this discrepancy was assigned to the *DSM*. Critics claimed that the manual lacked what in the world of science is known as “reliability”—the ability to produce a consistent, replicable result—and therefore also lacked scientific validity. In order for any diagnostic

instrument to be considered useful, it must have both. The S.A.T., for example, is viewed as reliable because a person who takes the test on a Tuesday and gets a score of 1200 will get a similar score if he takes the test on a Thursday. It is considered valid because scores are believed to correlate with an external reality—“scholastic aptitude”—and the test is seen as predictive of success in an academic setting. Though validity is the more important measure, it is impossible to achieve validity without reliability: if you take the S.A.T. on a Tuesday and get a 1200 and repeat it on a



Thursday and get a 600, the test is clearly not able to gauge academic performance. Reliability, therefore, is the threshold standard.

Problems with the reliability of psychiatric diagnosis became evident during the Second World War, when the military noticed that medical boards in different parts of the country had dramatically different rejection rates for men attempting to enlist. A draft board in Wichita, say, might have a twenty-per-cent exclusion rate, while Baltimore might find sixty per cent of its applicants unfit for service. Much of the disparity was on psychiatric grounds, and this was puzzling. It seemed implausible that the mental stability of potential recruits would vary so greatly from one area to another. A close study of the boards eventually determined that the psychiatrists responsible for making the decisions had widely divergent criteria. So a hypothesis emerged: perhaps it was not the young men but the doctors who were the problem.

In 1949, the psychologist Philip Ash published a study showing that three psychiatrists faced with a single patient, and given identical information at the same moment, were able to reach the same diagnostic conclusion only twenty per cent of the time. Aaron T. Beck, one

of the founders of cognitive behavioral therapy, published a similar paper on reliability in 1962. His review of nine different studies found rates of agreement between thirty-two and forty-two per cent. These were not encouraging numbers, given that diagnostic reliability isn't merely an academic issue: if psychiatrists can't agree on a patient's condition, then they can't agree on the treatment of that condition, and, essentially, there's no relationship between diagnosis and cure. In addition, research depends on doctors' ability to form homogeneous subject groups. How can you test the effectiveness of a new drug to treat depression if you can't be sure that the person you're testing is suffering from that disorder? Allen Frances, who worked under Spitzer on the *DSM-III* and who, in 1987, was appointed the director of the *DSM-IV*, says, "Without reliability the system is completely random, and the diagnoses mean almost nothing—maybe worse than nothing, because they're falsely labelling. You're better off not having a diagnostic system."

Spitzer had no particular interest in psychiatric diagnosis, but in 1966 he happened to share a lunch table in the Columbia cafeteria with the chairman of the *DSM-II* task force. The two struck up a conversation, got along well, and

by the end of the meal Spitzer had been offered the job of note-taker on the *DSM-II* committee. He accepted it, and served ably. He was soon promoted, and when gay activists began to protest the designation of homosexuality as a pathology Spitzer brokered a compromise that eventually resulted in the removal of homosexuality from the *DSM*. Given the acrimony surrounding the subject, this was an impressive feat of nosological diplomacy, and in the early seventies, when another revision of the *DSM* came due, Spitzer was asked to be the chairman of the task force.

Today, the chair of the *DSM* task force is a coveted post—people work for years to position themselves as candidates—but in the early nineteen-seventies descriptive psychiatry was a backwater. Donald Klein, a panic expert at Columbia, who contributed to the *DSM-III*, says, "When Bob was appointed to the *DSM-III*, the job was of no consequence. In fact, one of the reasons Bob got the job was that it wasn't considered that important. The vast majority of psychiatrists, or for that matter the A.P.A., didn't expect anything to come from it." This attitude was particularly prevalent among Freudian psychoanalysts, who were the voice of the mental-health profession for much of the twentieth century. They saw descriptive psychiatry as narrow, bloodless, and without real significance. "Psychoanalysts dismiss symptoms as being unimportant, and they say that the real thing is the internal conflicts," Klein says. "So to be interested in descriptive diagnosis was to be superficial and a little bit stupid."

Spitzer, however, managed to turn this obscurity to his advantage. Given unlimited administrative control, he established twenty-five committees whose task it would be to come up with detailed descriptions of mental disorders, and selected a group of psychiatrists who saw themselves primarily as scientists to sit on those committees. These men and women came to be known in the halls of Columbia as DOPs, for "data-oriented people." They were deeply skeptical of psychiatry's unquestioning embrace of Freud. "Rather than just appealing to authority, the authority of Freud, the appeal was: Are there studies? What evidence is there?" Spitzer says. "The peo-

ple I appointed had all made a commitment to be guided by data." Like Spitzer, Jean Endicott, one of the original members of the *DSM-III* task force, felt frustrated with the rigid dogmatism of psychoanalysis. She says, "For us DOPs, it was like, Come on—let's get out of the nineteenth century! Let's move into the twentieth, maybe the twenty-first, and apply what we've learned."

There was just one problem with this utopian vision of better psychiatry through science: the "science" hadn't yet been done. "There was very little systematic research, and much of the research that existed was really a hodgepodge—scattered, inconsistent, and ambiguous," Theodore Millon, one of the members of the *DSM-III* task force, says. "I think the majority of us recognized that the amount of good, solid science upon which we were making our decisions was pretty modest." Members of the various committees would regularly meet and attempt to come up with more specific and comprehensive descriptions of mental disorders. David Shaffer, a British psychiatrist who worked on the *DSM-III* and the *DSM-III-R*, told me that the sessions were often chaotic. "There would be these meetings of the so-called experts or advisers, and people would be standing and sitting and moving around," he said. "People would talk on top of each other. But Bob would be too busy typing notes to chair the meeting in an orderly way." One participant said that the haphazardness of the meetings he attended could be "disquieting." He went on, "Suddenly, these things would happen and there didn't seem to be much basis for it except that someone just decided all of a sudden to run with it." Allen Frances agrees that the loudest voices usually won out. Both he and Shaffer say, however, that the process designed by Spitzer was generally sound. "There was not another way of doing it, no extensive literature that one could turn to," Frances says. According to him, after the meetings Spitzer would retreat to his office to make sense of the information he'd collected. "The way it worked was that after a period of erosion, with different opinions being condensed in his mind, a list of criteria would come up," Frances says. "It would usually be some combination of the accepted wisdom of the

group, as interpreted by Bob, with a little added weight to the people he respected most, and a little bit to whoever got there last."

Because there are very few records of the process, it's hard to pin down exactly how Spitzer and his staff determined which mental disorders to include in the new manual and which to reject. Spitzer seems to have made many of the final decisions with minimal consultation. "He must have had some internal criteria," Shaffer says. "But I don't always know what they were." One afternoon in his office at Columbia, I asked Spitzer what factors would lead him to add a new disease. "How logical it was," he said, vaguely. "Whether it fit in. The main thing was that it had to make sense. It had to be logical." He went on, "For most of the categories, it was just the best thinking of people who seemed to have expertise in the area."

Not every mental disorder made the final cut. For instance, a group of child psychiatrists aspired to introduce a category they called "atypical child"—an idea that, according to Spitzer, didn't survive the first meeting. "I kept saying, 'O.K., how would you define 'atypical child'?' And the answer was 'Well, it's very difficult to define, because these kids are all very different.'" As a general

rule, though, Spitzer was more interested in including mental disorders than in excluding them. "Bob never met a new diagnosis that he didn't at least get interested in," Frances says. "Anything, however against his own leanings that might be, was a new thing to play with, a new toy." In 1974, Roger Peele and Paul Luisada, psychiatrists at St. Elizabeths Hospital, in Washington, D.C., wrote a paper in which they used the term "hysterical psychoses" to describe the behavior of two kinds of patients they had observed: those who suffered from extremely short episodes of delusion and hallucination after a major traumatic event, and those who felt compelled to show up in an emergency room even though they had no genuine physical or psychological problems. Spitzer read the paper and asked Peele and Luisada if he could come to Washington to meet them. During a forty-minute conversation, the three decided that "hysterical psychoses" should really be divided into two disorders. Short episodes of delusion and hallucination would be labelled "brief reactive psychosis," and the tendency to show up in an emergency room without authentic cause would be called "factitious disorder." "Then Bob asked for a typewriter," Peele says. To Peele's surprise, Spitzer drafted the def-



"Hey, honey! I thought of something else you can put on your restraining order."

initions on the spot. "He banged out criteria sets for factitious disorder and for brief reactive psychosis, and it struck me that this was a productive fellow! He comes in to talk about an issue and walks away with diagnostic criteria for two different mental disorders!" Both factitious disorder and brief reactive psychosis were included in the *DSM-III* with only minor adjustments.

The process of identifying new disorders wasn't usually so improvisatory, though, and it is certain that psychiatric treatment was significantly improved by the designation of many of the new syndromes. Attention-deficit disorder, autism, anorexia nervosa, bulimia, panic disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder are all examples of diseases added during Spitzer's tenure which now receive specialized treatment. But by far the most radical innovation in the new *DSM*—and certainly the one that got the most attention in the psychiatric community—was that, alongside the greatly expanded prose descriptions for each disorder, Spitzer added a checklist of symptoms that should be present in order to justify a diagnosis. For example, the current *DSM* describes a person with obsessive-compulsive personality disorder as someone who:

—is preoccupied with details, rules, lists, order, organization, or schedules to the extent that the major point of the activity is lost. . . .

—is unable to discard worn-out or worthless objects even when they have no sentimental value. . . .

—adopts a miserly spending style towards both self and others.

Five other criteria are listed in a box beneath the description of the disorder, and clinicians are cautioned that at least four of the eight must be present in order for the label to be applied.

Finally, Spitzer and the DOPs argued, here was the answer to the problem of reliability, the issue that had bedeviled psychiatry for years. As they understood it, there were two reasons that doctors couldn't agree on a diagnosis. The first was informational variance: because of rapport or interview style, different doctors get different information from the same patient. The second was interpretive variance: each doctor carries in his mind his own definition of what a specific disease looks like. One goal of the *DSM-III* was to reduce interpretive variance by standardizing definitions. Spitzer's

team reasoned that if a clear set of criteria were provided, diagnostic reliability would inevitably improve. They also argued that the criteria would enable mental-health professionals to communicate, and greatly facilitate psychiatric research. But the real victory was that each mental disorder could now be identified by a foolproof little recipe.

Spitzer labored over the *DSM-III* for six years, often working seventy or eighty hours a week. "He's kind of an idiot savant of diagnosis—in a good sense, in the sense that he never tires of it," Allen Frances says. John Talbott, a former president of the American Psychiatric Association, who has been friends with Spitzer for years, says, "I remember the first time I saw him walk into a breakfast at an A.P.A. meeting in a jogging suit, sweating, and having exercised. I was taken aback. The idea that I saw Bob Spitzer away from his suit and computer was mind-shattering." But Spitzer's dedication didn't always endear him to the people he worked with. "He was famous for walking down a crowded hallway and not looking left or right or saying anything to anyone," one colleague recalled. "He would never say hello. You could stand right next to him and be talking to him and he wouldn't even hear you. He didn't seem to recognize that anyone was there."

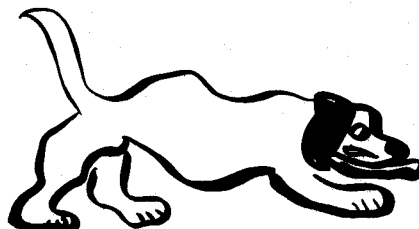
Despite Spitzer's genius at describing the particulars of emotional behavior, he didn't seem to grasp other people very well. Jean Endicott, his collaborator of many years, says, "He got very involved with issues, with ideas, and with questions. At times he was unaware of how people were responding to him or to the issue. He was surprised when he learned that someone was annoyed. He'd say, 'Why was he annoyed? What'd I do?'" After years of confrontations, Spitzer is now aware of this shortcoming, and says that he struggles with it in his everyday life. "I find it very hard to give presents," he says. "I never know

what to give. A lot of people, they can see something and say, 'Oh, that person would like that.' But that just doesn't happen to me. It's not that I'm stingy. I'm just not able to project what they would like." Frances argues that Spitzer's emotional myopia has benefitted him in his chosen career: "He doesn't understand people's emotions. He knows he doesn't. But that's actually helpful in labelling symptoms. It provides less noise."

What may have been a professional strength had disruptive consequences in Spitzer's personal life. In 1958, he married a doctor, and they had two children. As the demands of his project mounted, he spent less and less time with his family, and eventually fell in love with Janet Williams, an attractive, outspoken social worker he had hired to help edit the manual. In 1979, he and his wife separated, and several years later Spitzer and Williams were married. Williams became a professor at Columbia, and she and Spitzer went on to have three children. Spitzer remained close to his oldest son, but his relationship with his daughter from his first marriage was initially strained by the divorce.

The *DSM* was scheduled to be published in 1980, which meant that Spitzer had to have a draft prepared in the spring of 1979. Like any major American Psychiatric Association initiative, the *DSM* had to be ratified by the assembly of the A.P.A., a decision-making body composed of elected officials from all over the country. Spitzer's anti-Freudian ideas had caused resentment throughout the production process, and, as the date of the assembly approached, the opposition gathered strength and narrowed its focus to a single, crucial word—"neurosis"—which Spitzer wanted stricken from the *DSM*.

The term "neurosis" has a very long history, but over the course of the twentieth century it became inseparable from Freudian psychoanalytic philosophy. A neurosis, Freud believed, emerged from unconscious conflict. This was the bedrock psychoanalytic concept at the height of the psychoanalytic era, and both the *DSM-I* and the *DSM-II* made frequent use of the term. Spitzer and the DOPs, however, reasoned that, because a wide range of mental-health professionals were going to use the manual in everyday



practice, the *DSM* could not be aligned with any single theory. They decided to restrict themselves simply to describing behaviors that were visible to the human eye: they couldn't tell you why someone developed obsessive-compulsive personality disorder, but they were happy to observe that such a person is often "over-conscientious, scrupulous, and inflexible about matters of morality."

When word of Spitzer's intention to eliminate "neurosis" from the *DSM* got out, Donald Klein says, "people were aghast. 'Neurosis' was the bread-and-butter term of psychiatry, and people thought that we were calling into question their livelihood." Roger Peele, of St. Elizabeths, was sympathetic to Spitzer's work, but, as a representative of the Washington, D.C., branch of the A.P.A., he felt a need to challenge Spitzer on behalf of his constituency. "The most common diagnosis in private practices in Washington, D.C., in the nineteen-seventies was something called depressive neurosis," Peele says. "That was what they were doing day after day." Psychoanalysts bitterly denounced the early drafts. One psychiatrist, Howard Berk, wrote a letter to Spitzer saying that "the *DSM-III* gets rid of the castle of neurosis and replaces it with a diagnostic Levittown."

Without the support of the psychoanalysts, it was possible that the *DSM-III* wouldn't pass the assembly and the entire project would come to nothing. The A.P.A. leadership got involved, instructing Spitzer and the DOPs to include psychoanalysts in their deliberations. After months of acrimonious debate, Spitzer and the psychoanalysts were able to reach a compromise: the word "neurosis" was retained in discreet parentheses in three or four key categories.

With this issue resolved, Spitzer presented the final draft of the *DSM-III* to the A.P.A. assembly in May of 1979. Roughly three hundred and fifty psychiatrists gathered in a large auditorium in Chicago. Spitzer got up onstage and reviewed the *DSM* process and what they were trying to accomplish, and there was a motion to pass it. "Then a rather remarkable thing happened," Peele says. "Something that you don't see in the assembly very often. People stood up and applauded." Peele remembers watching shock break over Spitzer's face. "Bob's



"Put it under your pillow, and maybe you'll get a visit from the hair fairy."

eyes got watery. Here was a group that he was afraid would torpedo all his efforts, and instead he gets a standing ovation."

The *DSM-III* and the *DSM-III-R* together sold more than a million copies. Sales of the *DSM-IV* (1994) also exceeded a million, and the *DSM-IV-TR* (for "text revision"), the most recent iteration of the *DSM*, has sold four hundred and twenty thousand copies since its publication, in 2000. Its success continues to grow. Today, there are forty *DSM*-related products available on the Web site of the American Psychiatric Association. Stuart Kirk, a professor of public policy at U.C.L.A., and Herb Kutchins, a professor emeritus of social work at California State University, Sacramento, have studied the creation of the modern *DSM* for more than seventeen years, and they argue that its financial and academic success can be attributed to Spitzer's skillful salesmanship. According to Kirk and Kutchins, immediately

after the publication of the *DSM-III* Spitzer embarked on a P.R. campaign, touting its reliability as "far greater" and "higher than previously achieved" and "extremely good." "For the first time . . . claims were made that the new manual was scientifically sound," they write in "Making Us Crazy: DSM—The Psychiatric Bible and the Creation of Mental Disorders" (1997). Gerald Klerman, a prominent psychiatrist, published an influential book in 1986 that flatly announced, "The reliability problem has been solved."

It was largely on the basis of statements like these that the new *DSM* was embraced by psychiatrists and psychiatric institutions all over the globe. "The *DSM* revolution in reliability is a revolution in rhetoric, not in reality," Kutchins and Kirk write. Kirk told me, "No one really scrutinized the science very carefully." This was owing, in part, to the manual's imposing physical appearance. "One of the objections was that it appeared to be more authoritative



"And, what's worse, this has cost me some Iraqi contracts."

than it was. The way it was laid out made it seem like a textbook, as if it was a depository of all known facts," David Shaffer says. "The average reader would feel that it carried great authority and weight, which was not necessarily merited."

Almost immediately, the book started to turn up everywhere. It was translated into thirteen languages. Insurance companies, which expanded their coverage as psychotherapy became more widespread in the nineteen-seventies, welcomed the *DSM-III* as a standard. But it was more than that: the *DSM* had become a cultural phenomenon. There were splashy stories in the press, and TV news magazines showcased several of the newly identified disorders. "It was a runaway success in terms of publicity," Allen Frances says. Spitzer, Williams, and the rest of the DOPs were surprised and pleased by the reception. "For us it was kind of like being rock stars," Williams says. "Because everyone saw that it was the next big thing, everyone knew us and wanted to talk to us. It was like suddenly being the most popular kid on the block."

A year and a half after the publication of the *DSM-III*, Spitzer began work on its revision. Emboldened by his success, he became still more adamant about his opinions, and made enemies of a variety of groups. "I love controversy," Spitzer admits, "so if there was something that I thought needed to be added that was controversial, so much the better." He enraged feminists when he tried to include a diagnosis termed "masochistic personality disorder," a nonsexual form of masochism which critics claimed implied that some abused wives might be responsible for their own mistreatment. He angered women's groups again when he attempted to designate PMS as a mental disorder ("pre-menstrual dysphoric disorder"). "A lot of what's in the *DSM* represents what Bob thinks is right," Michael First, a psychiatrist at Columbia who worked on both the *DSM-III-R* and *DSM-IV*, says. "He really saw this as *his* book, and if he thought it was right he would push very hard to get it in that way." Thus, despite the success of Spitzer's two editions, and despite extensive lobbying on his part, the American Psychiatric Association

gave the chairmanship of the *DSM-IV* task force to Allen Frances. "The American Psychiatric Association decided that they had had enough of Spitzer, and I can understand that," Spitzer says with a note of regret in his voice. "I think that there was a feeling that if the *DSM* was going to represent the entire profession—which obviously it has to—it would be good to have someone else." This certainly was part of the reason. But Spitzer's colleagues believe that the single-mindedness with which he transformed the *DSM* also contributed to his eclipse. "I think that Spitzer looked better in *III* than he did in *III-R*," Peele says. "*III-R*, for one reason or another, came across as more heavy-handed—'Spitzer wants it this way!'"

As chair of the *DSM-IV*, Frances quickly set about constructing a more transparent process. Power was decentralized, there were systematic literature reviews, and the committees were put on notice that, as Frances says, "the wild growth and casual addition" of new mental disorders were to be avoided. Spitzer was made special adviser to the *DSM-IV* task force, but his power was dramatically reduced. He found the whole experience profoundly distressing. "I had the feeling that this wonderful thing that I created was going to be destroyed," he says.

The official position of the American Psychiatric Association is that the reliability of the *DSM* is sound. Darrel Regier, the director of research at the A.P.A., says, "Reliability is, of course, improved. Because you have the criteria, you're not depending on untestable theories of the cause of a diagnosis." He says that psychiatric practice was so radically changed by Spitzer's *DSM*—it was, for the first time, at least nominally evidence-based—that it's impossible to compare reliability before and after. One consequence of the addition of diagnostic criteria was the creation of long, structured interviews, which have allowed psychiatrists successfully to assemble homogeneous research populations for clinical trials. In this context, the *DSM* diagnoses have been found to be reliable.

But structured interviews don't always have much in common with the conversations that take place in thera-

pists' offices, and since the publication of the *DSM-III*, in 1980, no major study has been able to demonstrate a substantive improvement in reliability in those less formal settings. During the production of the *DSM-IV*, the American Psychiatric Association received funding from the MacArthur Foundation to undertake a broad reliability study, and although the research phase of the project was completed, the findings were never published. The director of the project, Jim Thompson, says that the A.P.A. ran out of money. Another study, whose primary author was Spitzer's wife, Janet Williams, took place at six sites in the United States and one in Germany. Supervised by Williams and some of the most experienced diagnostic professionals in the world, the participating clinicians were given extensive special training before being split into pairs and asked to interview nearly six hundred prospective patients. The idea was to determine whether clinicians faced with the same client could agree on a diagnosis using the *DSM*. Although Williams claims that the study supported the reliability of the *DSM*, when the investigators wrote up their results they admitted that they "had expected higher reliability values." In fact, Kutchins and Kirk point out, the results were "not that different from those statistics achieved in the 1950s and 1960s—and in some cases were worse."

Reliability is probably lowest in the place where the most diagnoses are made: the therapist's office. As Tom Widiger, who served as head of research for the *DSM-IV*, points out, "There are lots of studies which show that clinicians diagnose most of their patients with one particular disorder and really don't systematically assess for other disorders. They have a bias in reference to the disorder that they are especially interested in treating and believe that most of their patients have." Unfortunately, because psychiatry and its sister disciplines stand under the authoritative banner of science, consumers are often reluctant to challenge the labels they are given. Diagnoses are frequently liberating, helping a person to understand that what he views as a personal failing is actually a medical problem, but they can in certain cases become self-fulfilling prophecies. A child inappro-

priately given the label of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder can come to see himself as broken or limited, and act accordingly. And there are other problems with the *DSM*. Critics complain that it often characterizes everyday behaviors as abnormal, and that it continues to lack validity, whether or not the issue of reliability has been definitively resolved.

Even some of the manual's early advocates now think that the broad claims of reliability were exaggerated. "To my way of thinking, the reliability of the *DSM*—although improved—has been oversold by some people," Allen Frances says. "From a cultural standpoint, reliability was a way of authenticating the *DSM* as a radical innovation." He adds, "In a vacuum, to create criteria that were based on accepted wisdom as a first stab was fine, as long as you didn't take it too seriously. The processes that happened were very limited, but they were valuable in their context." And Frances believes that both psychiatry and the public have benefitted in a less tangible way from the collective fantasy that the *DSM* was a genuine scientific tool. "In my view, if I had been doing the *DSM-III* it would never have been as famous a document, because I'm a skeptic," he says. "But it was good for the world at large. Good for psychiatry, good

for patients. Good for everyone at that point in time to have someone whose view may have been more simpleminded than the world really is. A more complex view of life at that point would have resulted in a ho-hum 'We have this book and maybe it will be useful in our field.' The revolution came not just from the material itself, from the substance of it, but from the passion with which it was introduced."

Spitzer, too, has grown more circumspect. "To say that we've solved the reliability problem is just not true," he told me one afternoon in his office at Columbia. "It's been improved. But if you're in a situation with a general clinician it's certainly not very good. There's still a real problem, and it's not clear how to solve the problem." His personal investment in the *DSM* remains intense. During one of our conversations, I asked Spitzer if he ever feels a sense of ownership when troubled friends speak to him of their new diagnoses, or perhaps when he comes across a newspaper account that features one of the disorders to which he gave so much of his life. He admitted that he does on occasion feel a small surge of pride. "My fingers were on the typewriter that typed those. They might have been changed somewhat, but they all went through my fingers," he said. "Every word." ♦

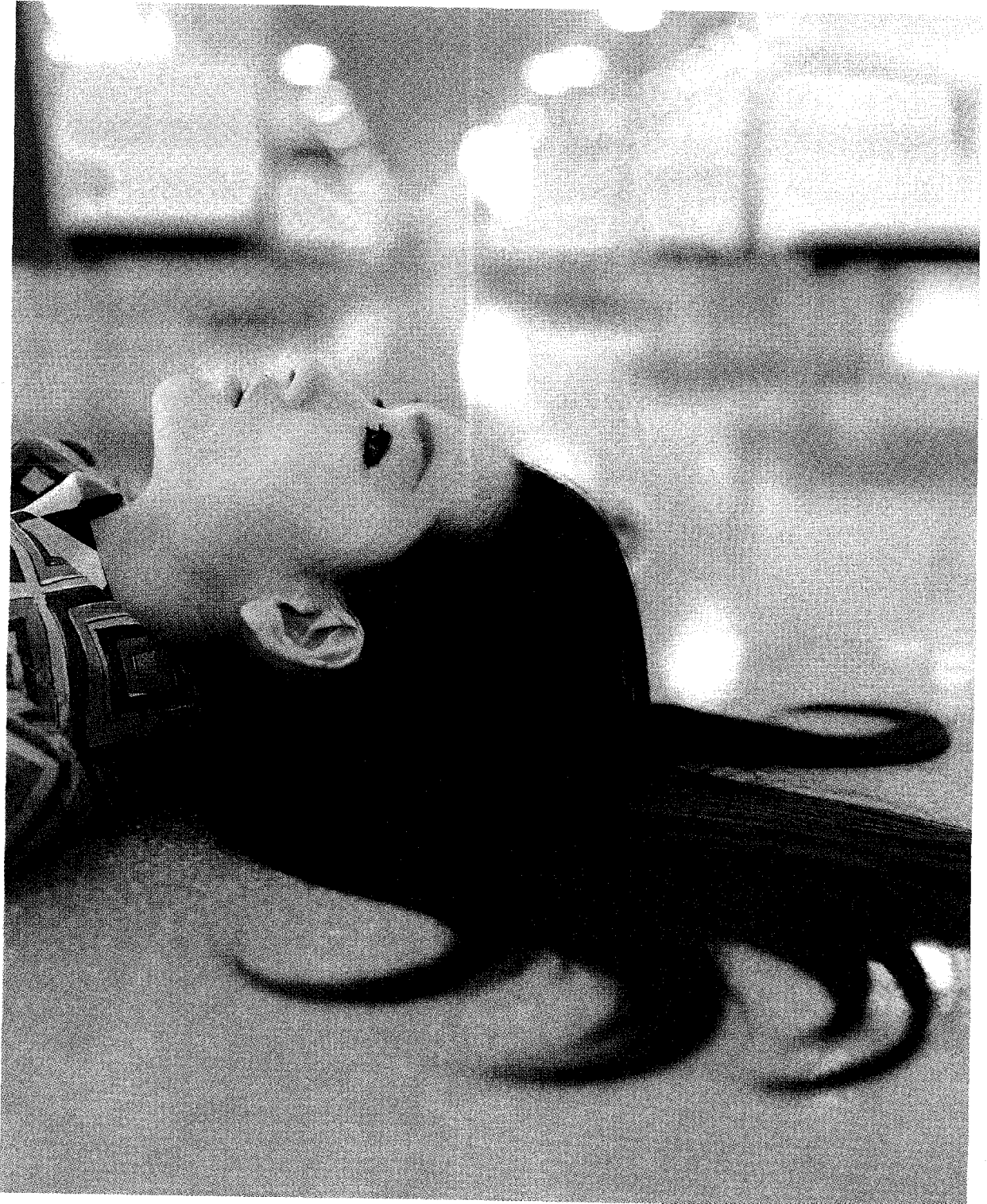


"How's everything?"

FICTION

I AM A NOVELIST

BY RYU MURAKAMI



I am a novelist. I'm thirty-five years old, and I've been a novelist for seven years. "Electronic Guerrilla," which I wrote when I was twenty-eight, sold more than six hundred thousand copies, and each of the novels I've published since—"Optic Fibre Love," "Sentimental Amorphous," "Tokyo Computer Death Match," and "Microwave Cosmopolitan"—has climbed high up the best-seller lists. This in spite of the fact that nobody, including myself, understands exactly what the books are about. When I wrote my first novel, I was still working in the P.R. department at Cray Research, an American computer company.

Quitting my job to become a novelist brought about three big changes in my life.

I got famous.

I got rich.

And I got fat.

"Hello, am I speaking with Okutegawa-sensei?"

The call comes to my office. It's a man's voice, but no one I know.

"You are," I say after tapping to the end of a sentence on my keyboard.

"I know this is awfully abrupt, but . . . may I ask if you're familiar with the Kannai district, in Yokohama?"

"I'm sorry, but I make it a policy not to do interviews over the telephone. I've been misquoted so often, you see."

There's a long pause. Apparently it isn't someone from the media.

"Are . . . are you familiar with Kannai?"

"I've been there. May I ask what this is about?"

"Yes, of course. I'm the manager of a club in Kannai called Julia."

"And?"

"Are you familiar with it?"

"With what?"

"With our club?"

"The only club I know in Kannai is The Door."

"The Door? Do you go there often?"

"Just once. And it was quite a while ago."

"Were you there last week?"

"No, no, it was before I even started writing novels—must be eight years, maybe more. When I was still a salaryman. A client took me there. Shockingly expensive place, as I recall."

I hear a hand cover the mouthpiece,

and there's another pause. He's speaking to someone else, though I can't make out what he's saying. Then he comes back on the line.

"The truth is . . . It's a very embarrassing situation, I'm afraid, but . . . for the past two months, a gentleman who claims to be Okutegawa-sensei, the famous author, has been . . . favoring us with his patronage."

I smirk to myself. An impostor.

"Well, he's not me."

"The unfortunate thing is that . . . I don't like to say this, but . . . the gentleman is now a million six hundred and thirty-eight thousand yen in our debt."

"Now, just a moment. That has nothing to do with me."

"No, of course not. We're fully aware that the blame lies entirely with us."

"It's a little hard to understand, though. I should think anyone posing as me would be quite easily exposed."

"Yes, but, well, this may sound rather presumptuous, but our club is frequented by clients of considerable status—politicians, businessmen, artists. It's not unusual for large corporations to spend as much as two million yen a month in entertainment expenses at Julia. To cast unwarranted suspicion on a customer could be—"

"Did he look like me?"

"He . . . well . . . Okutegawa-sensei, is it true that you've . . . that you've put on a bit of weight recently?"

I weigh forty pounds more than I did when I debuted as a writer.

"The photograph in your first book, 'Electone Guerrilla' . . ."

"'Electronic Guerrilla.'"

"Yes, of course, I'm so sorry. My daughter takes lessons on a Yamaha Electone, and I—"

"That's all very interesting, I'm sure, but you were saying? There was a photograph of me in that book, yes."

"Yes, well, forgive me, but . . . have you changed much since that photo was taken?"

I've changed plenty. What do you expect? But it's not as if you wouldn't recognize me.

"Okutegawa-sensei—that is, the Okutegawa-sensei who came to our club—brought a number of his books, or, rather, your books, and signed them for us. I was given one myself, and the girls—"

"I've never taken one of my books to

a bar in my life. Of all the shameless—"

"One of the girls here is pregnant with his child."

I'm not surprised. A man who thinks nothing of going around handing out autographs—knocking up a hostess or two would be all in a day's work for a creep like that.

"She's here with me now, in fact. She believes that the man was the real Okutegawa-sensei, and nothing I say seems to convince her that he wasn't. We're at a coffee shop near your building. Would it be too much to ask you to join us, if only for a few minutes?"

As soon as the woman sees me, she moans, "It's not him," and lays her head on the table and cries. She's—what can I tell you?—she's perfect. She's wearing a white dress and white lace stockings with electric-blue shoes. Her ankles are trim, she's suntanned, her skin is smooth, she has an oval face, big eyes, and . . . well, she's just perfect.

The manager is a man of about sixty. He's trying to console her.

"You've been taken for a ride, that's all there is to it," he says to the woman. "You'll just have to face up to the truth."

I hold out a handkerchief to her. She looks at me through liquid eyes, stretches out an arm as beautiful as a coral reef in the South Seas, and takes the handkerchief. Her name is Mutsumi.

I've invited Mutsumi to the fanciest restaurant I know. She's wearing an emerald-green suit and a shell necklace. In the soft light of the candles, she looks to me exactly like the Italian actress I used to moon over when I was in high school. I mention this to a waiter I know, and when he tells me there's no resemblance whatsoever I realize I'm a goner. Whenever I fall in love with a woman, she begins to look like that Italian actress.

For an hors d'œuvre we have marinated kokanee salmon.

"Maybe you'd rather not talk about this, but did he—did the impostor look like me?"

Mutsumi peers at me. She bites her lip, as if remembering something painful, and peers at me. Finally, she says, "Up close like this, you don't look anything like him."

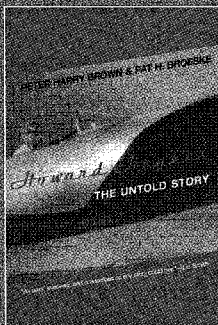
This disturbs me a bit. I'm jealous. Jealous of my own impersonator.

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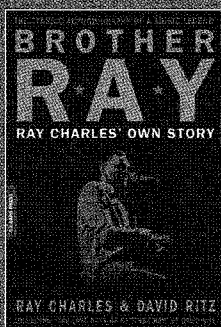
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DA CAPO

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Mutsumi has a bowl of curried sea-turtle soup.

"Well, there's one thing he and I have in common," I tell her, fully aware that what I'm about to say is going to sound hopelessly affected. "Our taste in women."

Mutsumi lifts her head sharply and tells me to stop teasing her. It saddens me to think I've made her angry by trying to say something suave. But, then again, this is a woman who fell for a man who hands out phony autographs in bars. Surely there's hope.

After all, I'm the real thing.

"I'm not teasing you. I really do like you."

We're drinking a well-chilled Fleurie. Mutsumi puts it away pretty well.

"He never said that sort of thing to me."

"What sort of thing?"

"I like you, I love you, that sort of thing."

"But you were lovers, weren't you?"

"A lot of times he'd come to the club and call different girls to his table."

"That's strange."

"He probably did it with three or four of the other hostesses, too."

"Did it? You mean . . . ?"

"Fucked them. A fuck's just a fuck."

The people at the table next to ours look at us. Mutsumi doesn't so much as bat an eyelash.

"He didn't do it with me until right before he disappeared."

"Really? That's nice."

"Nice? What's nice about it?"

"I mean, not to do it. It would be hard not to, I'll wager."

"He just didn't want to."

"But in the end you did it, right?"

"Look, what's this thing you've got with 'did it' or 'didn't do it'? I don't like that," she says, and forks a piece of char-broiled duck into her mouth.

"Did you read any of my books?"

"All of them."

"All?"

"Well, I was a fan."

"You were a fan of mine?" I can't suppress a goofy smile. "Listen, Mutsumi-chan, there's something else I don't understand about your relationship with this man . . ."

"Call me Mu-chan. That's the name I go by at the club."

"Mu-chan."

"Anyway, I liked him, that's all."

"What sort of man was he?"

Mutsumi bursts out laughing.

"What's so funny?"

"You! Don't you think it's strange that the real person should be so curious about the impostor?"

"I'm only asking because I want to know what sort of men you like."

"Look, I thought he was you, right?"

"That's true. So any kind of man is all right if he's an author?"

"I told you I was a fan."

"Well, then . . . Wait a minute, wait a minute. Listen, the fact is, the indisputable fact is, that I wrote those books."

Mutsumi laughs again. "I know."

"So isn't it possible that you could fall in love with me?"

Mutsumi stops laughing, bows her head, takes a slim American cigarette out of an ivory cigarette case, and lights it. Then she looks up and tells me it's a question of feelings.

"I should have fallen in love with you," she says. "But that's not what happened."

"What are you going to do about the baby?"

"I'm going to get rid of it. Next week."

It makes me sad to hear that. It's almost as if it were all my fault.

I've come to call on Mutsumi at her condominium bearing a bouquet of flowers and a signed copy of my latest book, "The Ultra-LSI Club Epistles." Mutsumi is in pajamas and a dressing gown and isn't wearing any makeup, but she's lovely just the same.

She serves me a cup of coffee.

"It's all right for you to be up and about like this?"

Maybe it's just my imagination, but her cheeks look a little hollow.

"Yes. Thank you for calling me every day. It helped me not get too depressed. Getting that many calls from you, though, I almost started to feel like it was your baby."

How wonderful it would be if she'd been pregnant with my child!

"Did you think it over? What we talked about on the phone?"

"You were just trying to make me feel better, right? All that talk about marrying me. I couldn't believe it."

"I'm perfectly serious."

Since my divorce, I've accumulated three girlfriends. The problem is that

since meeting Mutsumi I completely lost any desire to sleep with them.

Mutsumi's room is a studio apartment. She has an easel and oil paints. She wants to be an artist. She says she thought that hostessing would provide her with a lot of free time to paint but found out otherwise.

"Look at me," I say.

"What?"

"Notice anything different?"

"This is only the third time I've met you."

"I've lost one pound and seven ounces."

Mutsumi's glancing through "The Ultra-LSI Club Epistles," but she closes it now and gives me a sad look. I've been cutting down on the liquor, going to a swimming club, and winding saran wrap around my belly every night before bed.

"You're trying to lose weight?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I want to look like the photo in my first book again."

I'm sitting on the edge of her bed. She walks up to me and takes my hand.

"Why didn't you show up at the club instead of him?"

"You know, I've been thinking about that myself. It's kind of complicated, but . . . How shall I put this? I think we were destined to fall in love, but there was a glitch."

"A glitch?"

"We were blipped apart."

"But why are you so set on me?"

"Mu-chan, all that's standing between us is a ghostly vacuum."

"Ah. The impostor, right?"

"It wouldn't be so bad if it were someone who didn't have anything to do with me. If you'd just been abandoned by somebody I never heard of."

"I know what you mean."

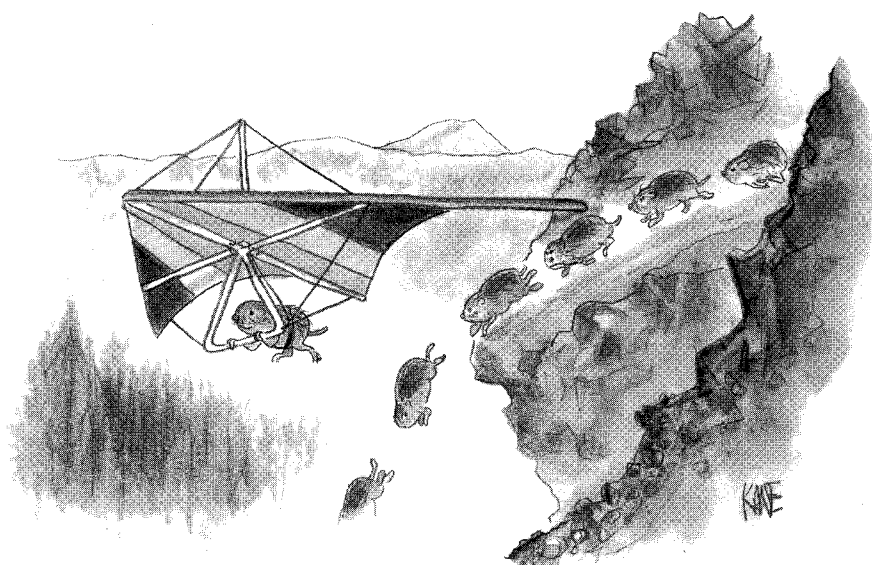
"Of course you do, you're a fan of my books! The theme of all my novels is that analogue time is dependent on the stimulus of digital time, that it can never be the other way around."

"Want to run that by me again?"

"Well, for example, it's like the way a toothache can affect someone's personality."

"Are you saying our relationship is like a toothache?"

"Mu-chan, what did you call my impostor?"



"At first I called him Sensei, but I didn't like the way that sounded, so I changed it to Okutegawa-san. He told me to call him Jun, but he was a writer I respected and it just sounded too familiar, so I stuck to Okutegawa-san. It's a mouthful, but that's what I called him."

"You never call me by my name at all, and I'm the real Jun Okutegawa."

"I know."

"I'm at a disadvantage here. Was it good with him?"

"What?"

"Sex."

"What kind of thing is that to ask?"

"It's important. It's what broke up my marriage."

"It wasn't good with your wife?"

"That's beside the point. Did you and the impostor usually come together?"

"You mean have orgasms together?"

Mutsumi is embarrassed. She turns pink down to her earlobes, but there's a little smile at the corners of her mouth. The memory of orgasm is irrepressible. You can't conceal it.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

"At your age, the size of the penis is irrelevant. The important thing is love."

"Listen to you."

"If you feel love for your partner, it leads to orgasm."

"Oh, great, a lecture. Just what a girl wants to hear after she's had an abortion."

"I'm sorry. But, look, you were in love with a man who was impersonating

me. Do you know what that means? It means that, for you, I'm the impostor."

Mutsumi asks me to leave. Tears are spilling from her eyes, running down her cheeks, and splashing over the blue veins on the back of her hand. In addition to being in the worst possible physical state because of the abortion, she's emotionally torn. First she became a fan of Jun Okutegawa's novels, then she fell in love with the "Jun Okutegawa" who stepped into her life. The name was just a suit of clothes at first, but the clothes came off and she was led down the road to orgasm, which is anonymous.

"Was my impostor a filthy-minded sort?"

"He made me do a lot of things," Mutsumi says. She's still crying. She's been doubly abandoned. By the name Jun Okutegawa and by the anonymous man stripped nude.

An abandoned woman—or man, for that matter—becomes starved for orgasm and throws herself (or himself) at people of the same type as the lost lover. Naturally, the replacement has a different name and background. In my case, though, it's just the opposite. I have the same name and background, but I'm a completely different type.

If Mutsumi had consciously set out to involve herself with a novelist, there wouldn't be anything to it. All she'd have to do is realize that I was the real thing and switch over to me.

Or, if her attitude had been that she didn't care about the man's position or

fame, if she'd fallen in love with him simply for being the man he was, I would still have some hope. But it wasn't just one or the other. She'd fallen in love with the man, but there was also a certain amount of pride involved in having had her favorite novelist fall in love with her.

So where does that leave me? From Mutsumi's point of view, I'm nothing but an imposition, an impostor. I've come to Cray Research to see an old friend of mine. He's one of the top four or five computer technicians in Japan. He listens to my proposal, shakes his head, and says, "Forget it."

"Please? Just try it. It's too much for the human brain. What's wrong with asking artificial intelligence for a little help?"

I had Mutsumi answer a fifty-question survey. Then I asked her to answer the same fifty questions from the perspective of the impostor, as far as she could remember. Finally, I answered the questions myself, which left me with three sets of corresponding data. Height and weight, parents' occupations, favorite dish, favorite movie, favorite type of music, favorite baseball team, fashion preferences, cigarettes, body odor, general physical condition, number of cavities in teeth, favorite liquor—if whiskey, whether bourbon or Scotch or Canadian or Irish—favorite cocktail, the first thing you order in a sushi bar, sports played, favorite position for intercourse, erotic zones, the first page you turn to in the newspaper, opinion of Marxism, and so on. I know it's silly, not much more than a gussied-up version of computer dating, but I'm clutching at straws. I'm so obsessed with the Mutsumi problem I haven't even been able to get any work done.

"You really are an idiot, aren't you? I thought you were when you came crying to me about your wife leaving, but this is even worse. I always thought novelists were supposed to be intelligent. I guess you're the exception that proves the rule."

He starts inputting the data even as he continues to grumble.

"I feel sorry for poor Borges, though," he says, diddling away at his keyboard.

"Who's Borges?"

"The new supercomputer we got about a month ago. I'm tapping into him."

"Why do you feel sorry for it?"

"Borges can do one billion six hundred million floating-point operations per second, and we give him this stupid-ass problem. If it's too stupid, he'll refuse to have anything to do with it, you know."

He looks up at me and grins.

"So now people are impersonating you," he says. "That proves how famous you're getting to be."

"I was grinning like that, too, until I actually met the woman."

"Look. Borges has agreed to run a simulation."

"Calling it by name like that makes it seem like a person."

"He's a likable rascal."

"You always used to say that about certain machines—that they were likable."

"Some of them are, much more than people. Human beings always have to prove themselves, maintain their pride and all that. It's a drag. Borges was equipped with self-esteem the day he was born."

"Computers can have self-esteem?"

"Yes."

"I thought they didn't have emotions."

"Pride isn't an emotion. What sort of novelist are you? You're hopeless. Pride is self-knowledge, a solid understanding of your limitations. It's living according to your own style. Am I right or am I right?"

A host of characters and letters and symbols and numbers fill the computer screen, line by line, and then disappear again.

"Pretty amazing, eh?" my friend says, looking quite pleased with himself.

"What is?"

"You mean you don't see what's amazing about this? And you're the one selling books with all those high-tech titles? You fraud. Borges is simulating all the possible combinations for each one of your fifty categories. We're talking about three sets of data with fifty categories each—it would take you a thousand years to do it! How's your ex-wife, by the way?"

"She's fine. I hear from my son once in

a while. He says she's taking swimming lessons and yoga lessons and cookie-baking lessons and going out with a college basketball coach. And yours?"

"She got remarried, to an executive at a coffee-importing firm, still in his thirties, they tell me. His first marriage, too. It's pretty impressive, if you ask me—I mean, I'm really impressed that my wife could pull something like that off. Me, the only person I put any faith in is Borges. Ah, here's the result. What's this? Carp? What does he mean, 'Carp'?"

"The Hiroshima Carp. My impersonator and Mutsumi and I are all Carp fans. But that's not an answer. What's he trying to say?"

"Idiot. Boy, are you thick. You take the girl to a ballgame. Sports are pure, they're simple, but that's what's good about them—there's nothing fishy going on, it's just throwing and hitting and running. And the impostor was a fan of the same team, so whatever pleasant memories she has about him and baseball will be transferred onto you. It's perfect."

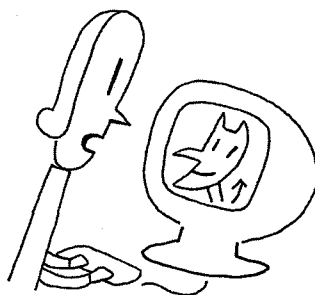
We're at Yokohama Stadium for the eighth regular-season game between the Whales and the Carp. Mutsumi squealed with delight when I invited her to the game. I've been a fan of the Carp ever since one New Year's about four years ago when I participated in a panel discussion with their manager, Koba-san.

The game's turning into a pitchers' duel between Endo for the Whales and Takagi for the Carp. In the bottom of the third, Kato gets a hit off Takagi, and then Leon Lee brings him home with a line drive through the gap in right-center. The wind is chilly, but the beer tastes great. It tastes that way because I'm sitting thigh to thigh with Mutsumi, who's wearing tight leather pants, silver sandals, and a satin T-shirt and stuffing her cheeks with popcorn.

"Mu-chan, why are you a Carp fan? You weren't born in Hiroshima, were you?"

"No. But a lot of the young guys on the team are really good-looking, right? Takagi's good-looking. Yoshihiko Takahashi, of course. Yamane, Kobayakawa, Kawaguchi, Moriwaki . . . They're all so handsome."

"Looks are important to you, aren't they?"



"They say you can't judge a book by its cover, but it's not true. The cover is all there is."

"But it is true that appearances can be deceptive."

"Only if you let yourself be influenced by what other people think. If you trust your own feelings, you can judge people by the way they look and never go wrong."

Which means what, in the particular case of the impostor and me? I wonder what he looked like. Mutsumi probably never realized what he was really like deep down inside. I wonder if he was a *lot* better-looking than me . . .

Sachio Kinugasa's solo homer in the top of the fifth dispels this train of thought from my mind.

Mutsumi and I clasp hands, jump up from our seats, and cheer like mad.

In the top of the seventh, Yoshihiko Takahashi draws a walk. Takahashi's been batting third since June, so next up is Koji Yamamoto. No outs, runner on first.

Some fool behind us in the third-base-line stands yells, "Run, Takahashi!"

"This is no time to try to steal," I say to Mutsumi.

"Why not?"

Mutsumi likes Takahashi best of all the players.

"They should let Koji concentrate on batting. How's he supposed to do that if Takahashi's playing cat and mouse with the pitcher and distracting him? Koji's the cleanup batter—just let him do his job."

"But it's Yoshihiko. I want him to run. I love watching him run."

Takahashi takes a big lead, and Endo takes forever, throwing to first any number of times. Yamamoto waits, steps out of the box, waits some more. More than a minute passes before Endo throws the second pitch, and Yamamoto's getting so impatient by this time that he swings at the ball and grounds to short for a double play.

"See? Takahashi blew a perfectly good chance by fiddling around out there on first. Endo's incredible today—we're not going to get that many runners."

Both Endo and Takagi are pitching brilliantly, and the game goes into extra innings.

It's the top of the tenth. Takahashi's up first. He takes a big cut at the first

pitch, a fork ball, and misses, and then, on the second pitch, lays a beautiful bunt down the third-base line.

Nobody out, man on first again. This time, Takahashi doesn't take such a big lead, but Yamamoto goes down swinging at Endo's fork ball. Nagashima gets just a piece of a fastball and fouls out to third.

Next up is Kobayakawa. He's my favorite player. But no sooner does he step into the batter's box than Takahashi starts to take a big lead again.

"Look at that jerk! Now he's making it hard for Kobayakawa to hit."

It happens as I'm grumbling these words. A voice several decibels louder than any of the others around us begins to shout.

"Run, Takahashi!"

It's a man's voice. When Mutsumi hears it, her face twitches. The man who shouted is standing on his seat several rows behind us. Mutsumi turns and looks up at him with a frightened expression on her face. She lets out a little cry and stiffens.

If I'm a hamburger steak at Denny's, the impostor is a veal filet en croûte at Maxim's. We're both meat of the same animal, but in terms of appearance and taste there's just no comparison. Mutsumi looks as if she were walking in her sleep. She stands up and drifts toward the filet.

She called me three days later.

"I'm sorry about what happened, but, see, it turns out he's in love with me, and he always was, and that's why when he heard I was a fan of yours he said he was you, just to try to get my attention, and he says the reason he always called other girls to his table was that he liked me so much it was embarrassing to him and he wanted to act as if he didn't like me that much, and of course he never went to bed with them or anything, but, anyway, after the manager called you up, there was nothing he could do, and since the receipts were in your name he couldn't put them on his expense account, but now he's paid it all back, and he says he's really sorry he caused you so much trouble, and he told me to ask you if you'd like to go out to dinner with us sometime so he can apologize. What do you think?" ♦

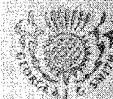
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THE CRITICS



BOOKS

THE VANISHING

In "Collapse," Jared Diamond shows how societies destroy themselves.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

A thousand years ago, a group of Vikings led by Erik the Red set sail from Norway for the vast Arctic land-mass west of Scandinavia which came to be known as Greenland. It was largely uninhabitable—a forbidding expanse of snow and ice. But along the southwestern coast there were two deep fjords protected from the harsh winds and saltwater spray of the North Atlantic Ocean, and as the Norse sailed upriver they saw grassy slopes flowering with buttercups, dandelions, and bluebells, and thick forests of willow and birch and alder. Two colonies were formed, three hundred miles apart, known as the Eastern and Western Settlements. The Norse raised sheep, goats, and cattle. They turned the grassy slopes into pastureland. They hunted seal and caribou. They built a string of parish churches and a magnificent cathedral, the remains of which are still standing. They traded actively with mainland Europe, and tithed regularly to the Roman Catholic Church. The Norse colonies in Greenland were law-abiding, economically viable, fully integrated communities, numbering at their peak five thousand people. They lasted for four hundred and fifty years—and then they vanished.

The story of the Eastern and Western Settlements of Greenland is told in Jared Diamond's "Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed" (Viking; \$29.95). Diamond teaches geography at U.C.L.A. and is well known for his best-seller "Guns, Germs, and Steel," which won a Pulitzer Prize. In

"Guns, Germs, and Steel," Diamond looked at environmental and structural factors to explain why Western societies came to dominate the world. In "Collapse," he continues that approach, only this time he looks at history's losers—like the Easter Islanders, the Anasazi of the American Southwest, the Mayans, and the modern-day Rwandans. We live in an era preoccupied with the way that ideology and culture and politics and economics help shape the course of history. But Diamond isn't particularly interested in any of those things—or, at least, he's interested in them only insofar as they bear on what to him is the far more important question, which is a society's relationship to its climate and geography and resources and neighbors. "Collapse" is a book about the most prosaic elements of the earth's ecosystem—soil, trees, and water—because societies fail, in Diamond's view, when they mismanage those environmental factors.

There was nothing wrong with the social organization of the Greenland settlements. The Norse built a functioning reproduction of the predominant northern-European civic model of the time—devout, structured, and reasonably orderly. In 1408, right before the end, records from the Eastern Settlement dutifully report that Thorstein Olafsson married Sigrid Bjornsdotter in Hvalsey Church on September 14th of that year, with Brand Halldorsson, Thord Jorundarson, Thorbjorn Bardarson, and Jon Jonsson as witnesses, following the proclamation of

the wedding banns on three consecutive Sundays.

The problem with the settlements, Diamond argues, was that the Norse thought that Greenland really was green; they treated it as if it were the verdant farmland of southern Norway. They cleared the land to create meadows for their cows, and to grow hay to feed their livestock through the long winter. They chopped down the forests for fuel, and for the construction of wooden objects. To make houses warm enough for the winter, they built their homes out of six-foot-thick slabs of turf, which meant that a typical home consumed about ten acres of grassland.

But Greenland's ecosystem was too fragile to withstand that kind of pressure. The short, cool growing season meant that plants developed slowly, which in turn meant that topsoil layers were shallow and lacking in soil constituents, like organic humus and clay, that hold moisture and keep soil resilient in the face of strong winds. "The sequence of soil erosion in Greenland begins with cutting or burning the cover of trees and shrubs, which are more effective at holding soil than is grass," he writes. "With the trees and shrubs gone, livestock, especially sheep and goats, graze down the grass, which regenerates only slowly in Greenland's climate. Once the grass cover is broken and the soil is exposed, soil is carried away especially by the strong winds, and also by pounding from occasionally heavy rains, to the point where the topsoil can be removed for a distance of miles from an entire valley." Without adequate pastureland, the summer hay yields shrank; without adequate supplies of hay, keeping livestock through the long winter got harder. And, without adequate supplies of wood, getting fuel for the winter became increasingly difficult.

The Norse needed to reduce their reliance on livestock—particularly cows, which consumed an enormous amount of agricultural resources. But cows were a sign of high status; to northern Europeans, beef was a prized food. They needed to copy the Inuit practice of burning seal blubber for heat and light in the winter, and to learn from the Inuit the difficult art of hunting ringed seals, which were the most reliably plentiful source of food available in the winter. But the

Norse had contempt for the Inuit—they called them *skraelings*, “wretches”—and preferred to practice their own brand of European agriculture. In the summer, when the Norse should have been sending ships on lumber-gathering missions to Labrador, in order to relieve the pressure on their own forestlands, they instead sent boats and men to the coast to hunt for walrus. Walrus tusks, after all, had great trade value. In return for those tusks, the Norse were able to acquire, among other things, church bells, stained-glass windows, bronze candlesticks, Communion wine, linen, silk, silver, churchmen’s robes, and jewelry to adorn their massive cathedral at Gardar, with its three-ton sandstone building blocks and eighty-foot bell tower. In the end, the Norse starved to death.

Diamond’s argument stands in sharp contrast to the conventional explanations for a society’s collapse. Usually, we look for some kind of cataclysmic event. The aboriginal civilization of the Americas was decimated by the sudden arrival of smallpox. European Jewry was destroyed by Nazism. Similarly, the disappearance of the Norse settlements is usually blamed on the Little Ice Age, which descended on Greenland in the early fourteen-hundreds, ending several centuries of relative warmth. (One archeologist refers to this as the “It got too cold, and they died” argument.) What all these explanations have in common is the idea that civilizations are destroyed by forces outside their control, by acts of God.

But look, Diamond says, at Easter Island. Once, it was home to a thriving culture that produced the enormous stone statues that continue to inspire awe. It was home to dozens of species of trees, which created and protected an ecosystem fertile enough to support

as many as thirty thousand people. Today, it’s a barren and largely empty outcropping of volcanic rock. What happened? Did a rare plant virus wipe out the island’s forest cover? Not at all. The Easter Islanders chopped their trees down, one by one, until they were

struction of this resource would result in the destruction of their civilization. The lesson of “Collapse” is that societies, as often as not, aren’t murdered. They commit suicide: they slit their wrists and then, in the course of many decades, stand by passively and watch themselves bleed to death.

This doesn’t mean that acts of God don’t play a role. It did get colder in Greenland in the early fourteen-hundreds. But it didn’t get so cold that the island became uninhabitable. The Inuit survived long after the Norse died out, and the Norse had all kinds of advantages, including a more diverse food supply, iron tools, and ready access to Europe. The problem was that the Norse simply couldn’t adapt to the country’s changing environmental conditions. Diamond writes, for instance, of the fact that nobody can find fish remains in Norse archeological sites. One scientist sifted through tons of debris from the Vatnahverfi farm and found only three fish bones; another researcher analyzed thirty-five thousand bones from the garbage of another Norse farm and found two fish bones. How can this be? Greenland is a fisherman’s dream: Diamond describes running into a Danish tourist in Greenland who had just caught two Arctic char in a shallow pool with her bare hands. “Every archaeologist who comes to excavate in Greenland . . . starts out with his or her own idea about where all those missing fish bones might be hiding,” he writes. “Could the Norse have strictly confined their munching on fish to within a

few feet of the shoreline, at sites now underwater because of land subsidence? Could they have faithfully saved all their fish bones for fertilizer, fuel, or feeding to cows?” It seems unlikely. There are no fish bones in Norse archeological remains, Diamond concludes, for the simple reason that the Norse didn’t eat



Easter Island was made treeless and barren by Easter Islanders.

all gone. “I have often asked myself, ‘What did the Easter Islander who cut down the last palm tree say while he was doing it?’” Diamond writes, and that, of course, is what is so troubling about the conclusions of “Collapse.” Those trees were felled by rational actors—who must have suspected that the de-

fish. For one reason or another, they had a cultural taboo against it.

Given the difficulty that the Norse had in putting food on the table, this was insane. Eating fish would have substantially reduced the ecological demands of the Norse settlements. The Norse would have needed fewer livestock and less pastureland. Fishing is not nearly as labor-intensive as raising cattle or hunting caribou, so eating fish would have freed time and energy for other activities. It would have diversified their diet.

Why did the Norse choose not to eat fish? Because they weren't thinking about their biological survival. They were thinking about their cultural survival. Food taboos are one of the idiosyncrasies that define a community. Not eating fish served the same function as building lavish churches, and doggedly replicating the untenable agricultural practices of their land of origin. It was part of what it meant to be Norse, and if you are going to establish a community in a harsh and forbidding environment all those little idiosyncrasies which define and cement a culture are of paramount importance. "The Norse were undone by the same social glue that had enabled them to master Greenland's difficulties," Diamond writes. "The values to which people cling most stubbornly under inappropriate conditions are those values that were previously the source of their greatest triumphs over adversity." He goes on:

To us in our secular modern society, the predicament in which the Greenlanders found themselves is difficult to fathom. To them, however, concerned with their social survival as much as their biological survival, it was out of the question to invest less in churches, to imitate or intermarry with the Inuit, and thereby to face an eternity in Hell just in order to survive another winter on Earth.

Diamond's distinction between social and biological survival is a critical one, because too often we blur the two, or assume that biological survival is contingent on the strength of our civilizational values. That was the lesson taken from the two world wars and the nuclear age that followed: we would survive as a species only if we learned to get along and resolve our disputes peacefully. The fact is, though, that we can be law-abiding and peace-loving and tol-

erant and inventive and committed to freedom and true to our own values and still behave in ways that are biologically suicidal. The two kinds of survival are separate.

Diamond points out that the Easter Islanders did not practice, so far as we know, a uniquely pathological version of South Pacific culture. Other societies, on other islands in the Hawaiian archipelago, chopped down trees and farmed and raised livestock just as the Easter Islanders did. What doomed the Easter Islanders was the interaction between what they did and where they were. Diamond and a colleague, Barry Rollet, identified nine physical factors that contributed to the likelihood of deforestation—including latitude, average rainfall, aerial-ash fallout, proximity to Central Asia's dust plume, size, and so on—and Easter Island ranked at the high-risk end of nearly every variable. "The reason for Easter's unusually severe degree of deforestation isn't that those seemingly nice people really were unusually bad or improvident," he concludes. "Instead, they had the misfortune to be living in one of the most fragile environments, at the highest risk for deforestation, of any Pacific people." The problem wasn't the Easter Islanders. It was Easter Island.

In the second half of "Collapse," Diamond turns his attention to modern examples, and one of his case studies is the recent genocide in Rwanda. What happened in Rwanda is commonly described as an ethnic struggle between the majority Hutu and the historically dominant, wealthier Tutsi, and it is understood in those terms because that is how we have come to explain much of modern conflict: Serb and Croat, Jew and Arab, Muslim and Christian. The world is a cauldron of cultural antagonism. It's an explanation that clearly exasperates Diamond. The Hutu didn't just kill the Tutsi, he points out. The Hutu also killed other Hutu. Why? Look at the land: steep hills farmed right up to the crests, without any protective terracing; rivers thick with mud from erosion; extreme deforestation leading to irregular rainfall and famine; staggeringly high population densities; the exhaustion of the topsoil; falling per-capita food production. This was a society on the brink of ecological disaster, and if there is anything that is clear from the

study of such societies it is that they inevitably descend into genocidal chaos. In "Collapse," Diamond quite convincingly defends himself against the charge of environmental determinism. His discussions are always nuanced, and he gives political and ideological factors their due. The real issue is how, in coming to terms with the uncertainties and hostilities of the world, the rest of us have turned ourselves into cultural determinists.

For the past thirty years, Oregon has had one of the strictest sets of land-use regulations in the nation, requiring new development to be clustered in and around existing urban development. The laws meant that Oregon has done perhaps the best job in the nation in limiting suburban sprawl, and protecting coastal lands and estuaries. But this November Oregon's voters passed a ballot referendum, known as Measure 37, that rolled back many of those protections. Specifically, Measure 37 said that anyone who could show that the value of his land was affected by regulations implemented since its purchase was entitled to compensation from the state. If the state declined to pay, the property owner would be exempted from the regulations.

To call Measure 37—and similar referendums that have been passed recently in other states—intellectually incoherent is to put it mildly. It might be that the reason your hundred-acre farm on a pristine hillside is worth millions to a developer is that it's on a pristine hillside: if everyone on that hillside could subdivide, and sell out to Target and Wal-Mart, then nobody's plot would be worth millions anymore. Will the voters of Oregon then pass Measure 38, allowing them to sue the state for compensation over damage to property values caused by Measure 37?

It is hard to read "Collapse," though, and not have an additional reaction to Measure 37. Supporters of the law spoke entirely in the language of political ideology. To them, the measure was a defense of property rights, preventing the state from unconstitutional "takings." If you replaced the term "property rights" with "First Amendment rights," this would have been indistinguishable from an argument over, say, whether charitable groups ought to be able to canvass in malls, or whether cities can control

the advertising they sell on the sides of public buses. As a society, we do a very good job with these kinds of debates: we give everyone a hearing, and pass laws, and make compromises, and square our conclusions with our constitutional heritage—and in the Oregon debate the quality of the theoretical argument was impressively high.

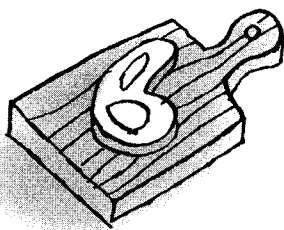
The thing that got lost in the debate, however, was the land. In a rapidly growing state like Oregon, what, precisely, are the state's ecological strengths and vulnerabilities? What impact will changed land-use priorities have on water and soil and cropland and forest? One can imagine Diamond writing about the Measure 37 debate, and he wouldn't be very impressed by how seriously Oregonians wrestled with the problem of squaring their land-use rules with their values, because to him a society's environmental birthright is not best discussed in those terms. Rivers and streams and forests and soil are a biological resource. They are a tangible, finite thing, and societies collapse when they get so consumed with addressing the fine points of their history and culture and deeply held beliefs—with making sure that Thorstein Olafsson and Sigrid Bjornsdotter are married before the right number of witnesses following the announcement of wedding banns on the right number of Sundays—that they forget that the pastureland is shrinking and the forest cover is gone.

When archeologists looked through the ruins of the Western Settlement, they found plenty of the big wooden objects that were so valuable in Greenland—crucifixes, bowls, furniture, doors, roof timbers—which meant that the end came too quickly for anyone to do any scavenging. And, when the archeologists looked at the animal bones left in the debris, they found the bones of newborn calves, meaning that the Norse, in that final winter, had given up on the future. They found toe bones from cows, equal to the number of cow spaces in the barn, meaning that the Norse ate their cattle down to the hoofs, and they found the bones of dogs covered with knife marks, meaning that, in the end, they had to eat their pets. But not fish bones, of course. Right up until they starved to death, the Norse never lost sight of what they stood for. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Seven Types of Ambiguity, by Elliot Perlman (Riverhead; \$27.95). Cheekily swiping the title of William Empson's seminal work of literary criticism, this second novel by Perlman, an Australian writer, presents seven first-person narrators—whose lives are all nudged off course by a man's abduction of his ex-girlfriend's young son—in a compulsively readable tangle. At the center is a psychiatrist who treats several of the characters, and whose narrative provides some basis for assessing the partial perspectives of the six others. The abductor's self-justifying rants about truth, literature, and post-structuralist theory win over his shrink and, it seems, everyone else. Still, if the individual stories of these characters are compelling, their attempts at Empsonian hermeneutics are less so.

The Story of My Baldness, by Marek van der Jagt, translated from the Dutch by Dr. Todd Armstrong (Other Press; \$22). This whimsical novel, written pseudonymously by a Dutch novelist, masquerades as the confessions of an Austrian philosophy student whose great accomplishment is a gloss of a gloss of Hegel's Phenomenology. Marek is an observer surrounded by actors, among them his drama-prone dead mother, notable for her string of lovers and her interest in handguns, and a professor studying the dreams of criminals, who ministers to Marek before giving up the pursuit of truth in order to sleep late. Next to them, Marek feels, understandably, insubstantial and unrealized. He decides to assert his existence by pursuing *l'amour fou*. Several romantic failures ensue, until he finds an older woman, an aficionado of the accordion and of vodka, who is responsible for the loss of his hair. "But what's a little baldness," Marek asks, "when one has known happiness?"



Wedgwood, by Brian Dolan (Viking; \$24.95). Before his death, in 1795, Josiah Wedgwood managed to get his pottery into the hands of the Queen of England, the Empress of Russia, and the Emperor of China; two centuries later, he is still cited as a model tycoon by no less an authority than Donald Trump. Dolan successfully conveys the reach both of Wedgwood's ambition and of his influence. His company was recognizably modern, employing colorful catalogues, preprinted order forms, corporate espionage, and celebrity endorsements. Dolan also argues that Wedgwood's business was inseparable from his involvement in the philosophical and scientific ferment of his time. Although Etruria, his factory complex, had its Dickensian side (workers died from "potter's rot," a form of silicosis), it was meant to be a model community, with housing, health insurance, and retirement schemes. Wedgwood was among the best chemists of the day, and he responded to market threats by returning to the laboratory in search of innovations.

The Photobook: Volume 1, by Martin Parr and Gerry Badger (Phaidon; \$75). Parr, an influential British photographer, admits to an obsession with collecting photobooks, and this sumptuous collection intends to establish the genre's importance in disseminating photographic styles and trends. Alongside acknowledged masterpieces by Walker Evans, August Sander, and Nobuyoshi Araki, Parr and Badger consider many less well-known examples. There are art books like "Paris," by Moï Ver, a Lithuanian contemporary of Brassai; didactic works such as the German medic Hans Killian's sixty-four images of suffering patients; and outright curios like Owen Simmons's 1903 "The Book of Bread" (forty life-size portraits of slices of bread). Sections on Soviet photobooks of the nineteen-thirties and Japanese photobooks of the nineteen-sixties point to two particularly fertile periods. One hopes that publishers may be spurred to reprint some of these exceptional books.

A LOVELY COUPLE

Bolcom's "A Wedding" at Chicago Lyric, and Handel's "Rodelinda" at the Met.

BY ALEX ROSS

The Lyric Opera of Chicago began life in the highest style, with Maria Callas making her American debut. Fifty years on, it is probably in better health than any other opera company in America. Almost every seat is filled, and the budget is in the black. Admittedly, you have to go elsewhere for radical ideas about production and repertory; Matthew Epstein, the artistic director, recently left after encountering opposition to his more adventurous plans. But the Lyric has a history of being one of very few American houses—the Houston Grand Opera and the Opera Theatre of St. Louis also come to mind—where premières are routine, and that's radical in itself. Usually, the collective genius of administration acts to stifle new opera, on the theory that audiences want only the aged, imported European product. True, if you hand out commissions to middle-of-the-road composers who prove maximally unobjectionable to the governing board, or to career academics who wouldn't know a narrative arc if it hit them in the head, you will perpetrate expensive fizzles. If, on the other hand, you hire composers who love the logic of theatre more than the sound of their own voices, you may end up with a joyous hit like William Bolcom's "A Wedding," which opened at the Lyric this month.

Bolcom, now sixty-six, is the rare living classical composer whom God made with the theatre in mind. He has honed his craft in opera, musicals, concert song, and cabaret (he tours with his wife, Joan Morris). His signature work is "Songs of Innocence and of Experience," a barbaric yawp of a piece that fuses William Blake's poetry with a welter of musical traditions, from Shaker hymns to reggae. It had its première back in 1984 but was recorded for the first time this year, thanks to the Naxos label. "Songs" has an awesome aura not

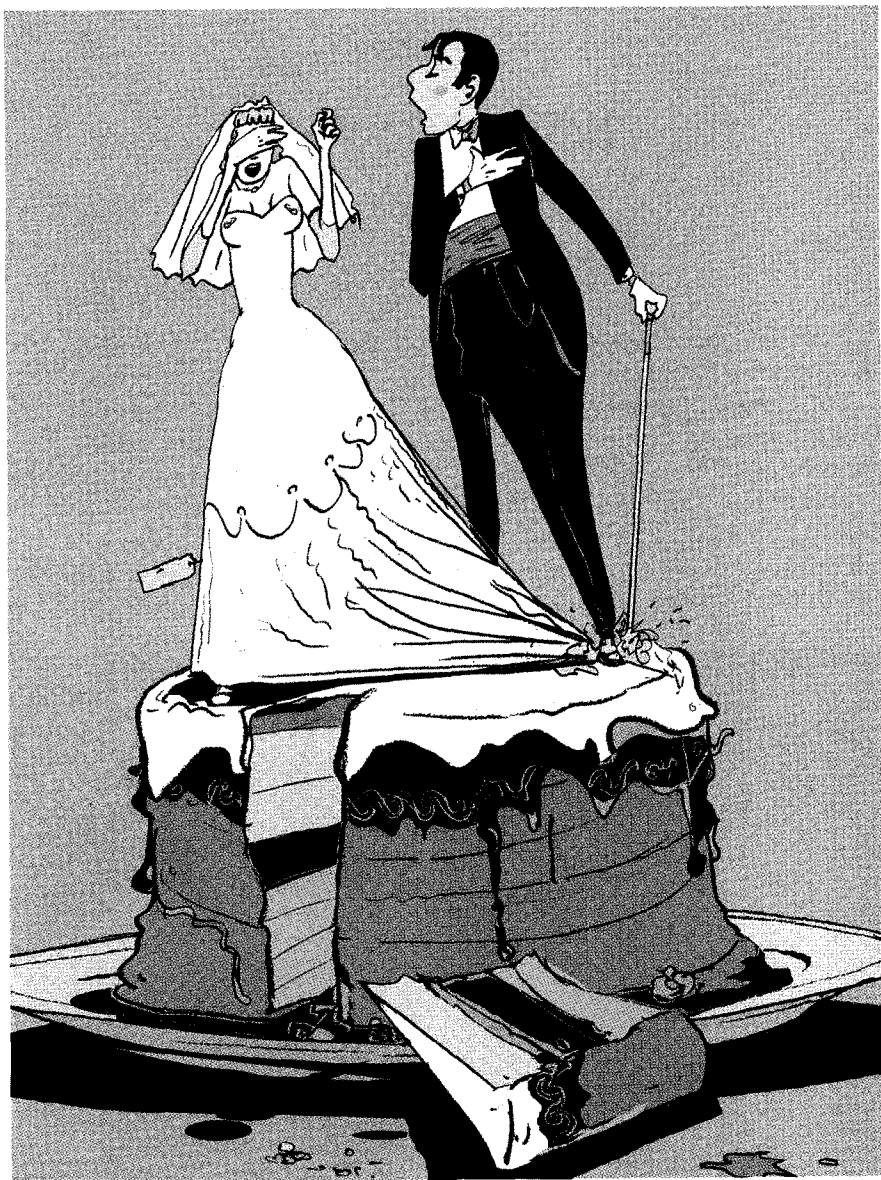
only because it embraces every imaginable style but because it gathers momentum and mystery as it moves along. The fact that Bolcom can knock out a Gershwinish tune like nobody's business has caused him to be underrated in the glum colloquia of contemporary music, where, for a long time, melodies had the status of radioactive rodents, and where seriousness is often measured by counting how many disparate pitches and rhythms pile up in any one bar. Bolcom aims for a higher complexity, a personal fusion of style and form. This is the many-sided music theatre of Monteverdi, Mozart, Verdi, and Weill. It don't get more serious than that.

"A Wedding" is Bolcom's third work for the Lyric, the others being "McTeague" and "A View from the Bridge." It takes off from Robert Altman's 1978 film of the same title, about an all-American train wreck of a wedding where old money and nouveau riche collide. Arnold Weinstein, Bolcom's longtime lyricist-librettist, worked with Altman to reduce the original cast of forty-eight characters to a still formidable assortment of nineteen. Here goes: The old-money matriarch—Nettie Sloan, of Lake Forest, Illinois—dies in the second scene, but her haughty, melancholy spirit hovers over the messy party that follows. Her daughters and in-laws include a factory owner who employs illegal immigrants (Beth Clayton); a doctor turned dealer in Pollock, de Kooning, and Kline (Jake Gardner); a flaky interpretive dancer (Patricia Risley) who loves the family's Caribbean butler (Mark Doss); an emotionally stunted morphine addict (Catherine Malfitano); and the groom, a military-academy graduate whose body is finer than his mind (Patrick Miller). The bride (Anna Christy) is an ingénue from Louisville, Kentucky, who has no idea what she's getting into.

Her parents are a reformed fornicator turned born-again millionaire (Mark Delavan) and a naïve belle who yearns for adventure (Lauren Flanigan). There are also Italians on the loose—the groom's father (Jerry Hadley) and his brother from the old country (David Cangelosi)—together with a Communitist aunt (Kathryn Harries), a hired wedding guest (Timothy Nolen), an obsessive-compulsive wedding planner (Maria Kanyova), and the best man, an alcoholic marine (Brian Leerhuber). A few stray plot strands and a quizzical ending aside, it's a deft libretto that balances zany double-entendres with plain-spoken poetry, mocking exaggeration with empathetic realism.

The trick in assessing Bolcom's music is to make it seem something other than a stylistic casserole. So let's take it for granted that the composer creates precise pastiches of everything from Rossini to rockabilly; that he throws in delightful allusions, like the Messiaenic birds that chirp Mrs. Sloan awake on the last day of her life; that he comes up with at least three indelible tunes. What impressed me here was the glistening web of sound behind the carnival—the interlocking modes, the multiple tonal layers, the silken ostinatos based on fragments of ditties you've already heard. A lot of these framing devices are owed to Bolcom's teacher, the ever-underrated Darius Milhaud, who, back in the twenties, stirred together samba, music-hall, and jazz. What I sometimes yearned for was the bitter taste of twenties Berlin to go along with the giddy kick of Paris. The creative team shied away from full-on screwball anarchy, from a lunge at the social jugular. For example, when the groom and the best man are discovered naked and drunk in the shower, you expect more of a payoff than a few puzzled shrugs. Then again, too much comic aggression might have unsettled the flow of Bolcom's score, which is half ironic, half tender, and fully enchanting.

Altman directed the production, and his genius for handling ensemble casts translated easily to the opera stage. A production team led by the Broadway veteran Robin Wagner created a charming nightmare of middle-American taste, all creamy-white and pink and baby-blue. Dennis Russell Davies



Bolcom's enchanting score has pastiches of everything from Rossini to rockabilly.

led the orchestra in a razor-sharp performance. The singers were obviously enjoying themselves hugely, not least because nearly everyone was given something with which to stop the show. Delavan shook his hips Elvis-style in "There was a time I was a drinker and a smoker." Hadley and Cangelosi exulted in tenorissimo kitsch in their duet, "Prosciutto, mortadella." Malfitano sent up her image as the queen of soprano hysteria with lines like "Oooh—what a teeny little needle can do." Harries and Nolen plunged fearlessly into a quite naughty duet ("I've got a lot of lawn to mow"). Gardner and Flanigan, whose characters teeter on the edge of a dalliance before backing wistfully away, brought the house down with the strains of "Heaven, heaven, heaven, Tallahassee!" Then the

mighty Flanigan topped herself with "A woman in love," which would have left Gershwin unsure whether to applaud or to sue.

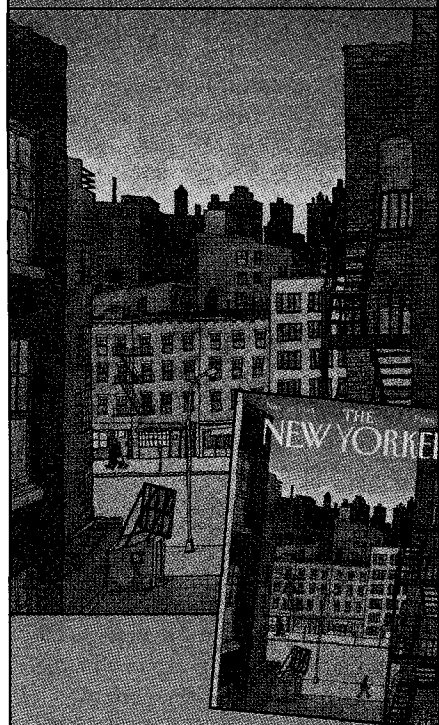
The Met may be somewhat clueless about contemporary opera, but it has put together two essentially perfect productions of golden oldies this fall. First came Julie Taymor's "Magic Flute"; now comes Stephen Wadsworth's "Rodelinda." Many people thought that the intricate, intimate art of Handel could never work in the Met's cavernous spaces, but Wadsworth proves otherwise. First of all, he plays "Rodelinda" absolutely straight, skipping the campy antics that other directors impose on Handel in the name of saving Baroque convention from itself. Wadsworth does

take the liberty of moving a shadowy tale of medieval Lombardy—deposed king in hiding, queen who thinks herself a widow, anguished pretender, happily scheming villain—into the lustrous eighteenth century. The sets, by Thomas Lynch, are an ecstasy of detail: the audience actually gasped at the sight of the King's library. Yet this is no Zeffirelli-style wax museum. The stage is filled with telling gestures, charged glances, meaningful motion. Wadsworth demonstrates that you don't have to apply shock tactics to make an ancient opera come alive.

The cast on opening night delivered one of the strongest ensemble performances I've seen at the Met. Renée Fleming, who used her star power to bring "Rodelinda" to the house, comfortably inhabited the taxing title role, supplying acres of warmth and nuance without drawing attention from her co-stars. Bejun Mehta and David Daniels fought a friendly countertenor duel, with Mehta scoring points for form and Daniels for charisma and stamina. There was really no rational explanation for how Daniels could sail through his climactic Act III aria, "Vivi, tiranno," as if he had just finished warming up. Stephanie Blythe sang with glowing emotional transparency; the South African tenor Kobie van Rensburg, as the usurper, etched every note; John Relyea rumbled happily as the basso villain. Harry Bicket drew uncannily stylish period sounds from the Met orchestra. The crowd devoured the four-hour marathon as if Handel were the new Puccini.

Both Fleming and Lorraine Hunt Lieberson have recently released disks of Handel arias, both with Bicket conducting the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. When you listen to these two modern divas singing "Ombra mai fù" side by side, you begin to mistrust recording as a medium: beauty of this order shouldn't be turned on at the touch of a button. Fleming sings the aria as a string of immaculate, silvery phrases—it's come-over-here, you-have-to-see-this beautiful. Hunt Lieberson makes it one long breath, one extended sigh. It's pull-down-the-blinds, unplug-the-telephone, can't-talk-right-now beautiful. She's singing it again; I have to go. ♦

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MR. WRONG

Neil LaBute's "Fat Pig."

BY JOHN LAHR

For a few minutes before Neil LaBute's "Fat Pig" begins (at the Lucille Lortel, directed by Jo Bonney), the supersized woman of the title stands before us, munching a slice of pizza and reading at a tall table in a busy restaurant. She is Helen (the compelling Ashlie Atkinson), a librarian who is in the neighborhood of two hundred and fifty pounds—not a

being blessed by the gods, as Goethe says, obesity suggests the opposite irrational aura—being damned in the flesh to be outcast, reviled, untouched.

Here, when a man enters with his tray and says, apparently to himself and about the room, "pretty big," Helen is quick to pick up on a hint of abuse. She calls him on it, and a conversation begins. Most



Jeremy Piven and Ashlie Atkinson. LaBute plays off the instinct to avert the eye.

neighborhood she looks to be leaving anytime soon. The moment is typical of LaBute's subversive prowess. He makes us stare at her. LaBute, who is a connoisseur of unsettling emotion, knows that Helen is a type whom the audience rarely scrutinizes on stage or in life; he plays off the public instinct to avert the eye. If beauty carries with it the magical sense of

playwrights don't earn their ending; LaBute, it seems to me, doesn't earn his beginning. However, such is his gift for dialogue that we soon become fascinated by these strangers. He is Tom (the excellent Jeremy Piven), a successful executive—neat, careful, well-spoken, charmingly average and conformist. When asked about his best qualities, Tom an-

swers, "Plays well with others." Helen is a solitary who has had to learn to be resourceful and brave. She has a penchant for war videos. "That's not very 'girly' of you," Tom says. Helen replies, "You're probably just dating the wrong *kinds* of girls"—a startling riposte that turns out to be all too true and makes Tom look at her in a different way. She is humorous and smart and sometimes brazenly direct. "I don't *only* eat. I can be coaxed into doing other stuff, too," she says. There is a rapport. He gets her number. She leaves. Then, in the sort of theatrical choice that makes LaBute such a fascinating writer, Helen returns to speak her heart. "Even to talk on the phone would be fine. . . . Just don't be afraid, Tom. I guess that's why I came back here, was to say that," she says. "Please do not let yourself be afraid of me or of taking some kind of blind chance, or what people think . . . because this could be so great." This superb speech allows us to see her understanding of him as well as of herself. She acts on her desires. She's clear-eyed and grownup. Tom, we soon learn, is one of those stuck adolescent souls who play life not to win but to not lose. His repressed heart is unable to define its desires. He'll do anything for an easy life. By contrast to plus-sized Helen, Tom isn't so much a will-o'-the-wisp as a wuss of the will.

LaBute's psychological terrain is the punishing slippery slope of ambivalence. In his hands, this bedevilling state of spiritual stasis comes with a distinctive mystifying sound, a sensational hemming and hawing, which poetically betrays the mind boxing clever with itself. Tom, who is sexually unresolved, is a master of verbal ducking and diving; it's a sort of linguistic three-card-monte trick played on himself as well as on others that is meant to disarm and to confound and to imply a reality that isn't there. In this way, Tom's sexual confusion is put onto others, and his sense of his own integrity is unchallenged.

Jeannie (the gorgeous Keri Russell), a hectoring office accountant who has been dating Tom and is being driven crazy by his mixed signals—his vows to restart their stalled relationship and his refusal to act—asks him, "Are you dating someone?" Tom's answer is a demonstration of what she calls his "circles thing": "No. Kind of. Hell, I dunno! I'm . . . It's not some big thing," he says of his

new relationship with Helen. Jeannie has the face of an angel and the soul of a parakeet; her presence allows LaBute to make an ironic contrast to Helen and to toy with our subliminal expectations of beauty. We want to like her, we pay special attention to her, we defer judgment of her. Even though Russell is a TV star who lacks the acting chops to give Jeannie's dialogue its proper wallop, the character's profound repugnance is clear: she's a vacuum with an hourglass figure. Tom, pushed beyond endurance by Jeannie to explain why he insisted that he wanted to see her again, finally admits, "To keep you from nagging at me! Just to stop you from calling and going on and on and on about this all the time! That's why!" Later, voicing his exasperation with women to his mischievous office buddy Carter (Andrew McCarthy)—Tom speaks with an unusual candor here, which, to me, holds the whiff of unconscious homosexual feeling—he betrays a narcissism that his self-deprecating palaver hides. "Why do we even have to do this crap? Get all involved with people and . . . ?" he asks.

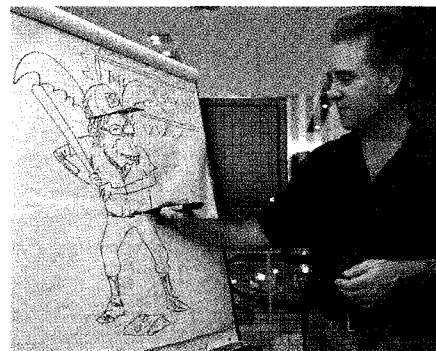
Tom's craven desire to be liked (he e-mails Jeannie an apology) and his sense of shame about Helen (she says she feels he hides her from his friends—and she's right) are emotions from which he's completely split off. He's a stranger to himself. In bed with Helen, he says, "I have honestly never been more relaxed around a person." He adds, "Well, my *mother*, but that gets into a weird area." Tom *is* a weird area. Are these just weasel words or genuine feelings? We never quite know; and it's a failure of the story that while Tom states his good feelings we don't have any demonstration of how Helen's generous love affects him. Tom makes a show of loyalty, but the only faith he keeps is bad faith.

In the end, sitting apart from Tom's colleagues on a company outing to the beach, Helen forces the issue of his shame. She faces reality—offering even to have her stomach stapled for him, "because of what you mean to me." "Helen, that was such a nice thing to offer," he says. Tom has the backbone of a chocolate éclair. "I want to be better, to do good and better things and to make a proper sort of decision here, but I . . . I can't," he says. LaBute brings the curtain down on this moment of pathetic stalemate. Helen and Tom stare out at the sea; they both are crying—she for a lost hope, he for a lost soul. ♦

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UNMASKED

"The Phantom of the Opera," "The Merchant of Venice."

BY ANTHONY LANE

What does it take to shake a movie fan? Whether we are critics or bug-eyed buffs, so many of our evenings are spent in the company of crimes and misdemeanors that we can hardly be blamed for developing the hide of a pachyderm. Just occasionally, something slips through—a thin shudder of monstrosity, enough to remind us of what it means to be afraid. And so it came about, this week, that I gazed at a black screen and saw words so calamitous that they might have been written in my own blood: "Screenplay by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Joel Schumacher."

It couldn't be any better, really, could it? The pairing of the tasteful genius behind "Batman & Robin" and the English peer who paid homage to T. S. Eliot by having grown men prance around wearing jerkins knitted from tabbies: what flash of fate brought these two together to merge into a seamless whole? The title of their shared project, which Schumacher directed, is not "The Phantom of the Opera" but "Andrew Lloyd Webber's The Phantom of the Opera," which, if misheard, might lead viewers to suppose that they could corner the Phantom, peel off his disguise, and reveal the features of none other than His Lordship. Now, that would be scary.

The plot is impressively free of anything that does not smell of unpasteurized melodrama. The bulk of it takes place in 1870, in Paris—ah, Paris, so overwhelming in its impact that while some of its blessed citizens remember to speak English with a French accent, others do not. We are at the Opéra, where everything and, if possible, everybody that can be gilded with gold has received the necessary treatment. The new patron is the Vicomte de Chagny (Patrick Wilson), who is long of locks, blue of blood, and unquenchably drippy of demeanor. The in-house diva is Carlotta—played with gusto by Minnie Driver, who has the gall to suggest that there might be

some comic value to be trawled from this movie, and who is therefore hastily shoved to the side of the proceedings before she can cause any more trouble. When Carlotta flounces out, her place is taken by Christine (Emmy Rossum), who until now has been, yes, a simple chorus girl, and who brings the house down on, yes, her first performance.



Gerard Butler and Emmy Rossum in the movie of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical.

But wait. There is more. Christine, who in other respects seems perfectly sane, believes that she has been taught to sing by the ghost of her father. In fact, her tutor is a nice lad in half a hockey mask who lives under the floorboards. He is the Phantom (Gerard Butler), his career ambitions include theatre management, and to get to his lair you go *through* the looking glass, *along* the creepy corridor, *down* the spiral staircase, take the *first* horse on your right (what the hell is a horse doing down there?), hop *into* the punt, drift *under* the dripping portcullis, *past* the multiple mirrors, and, *bang*, you're there, right in the middle of a bed shaped like a giant eagle. Watch out for its beak when you bend over to take your boots off.

As befits a man who began his career

decorating the windows of Bendel's, Joel Schumacher decorates his latest enterprise to within an inch of its life, if not beyond. There are nods to the inventiveness of Orson Welles and Jean Cocteau (the live, candle-bearing arms emerging from the wall are yet another steal from "Beauty and the Beast"), but Schumacher's principal debt is to the higher reaches of the textile industry, and if you ever longed to know what it feels like to be asphyxiated by brocade, here is your chance. The irony is that, as visual habits go, there is none more threadbare than this brand of subterranean gothic, at once fussy and lumpen, with its frankly unhygienic mixture of lingerie and dungeons. It reminds us that "The Phantom of the Opera" is a period piece, and that

the period in question is not 1870 but 1986, when Lloyd Webber first presented his production to the world. We should not be surprised, then, if this belching beast of a movie looks and sounds like the extended special-edition remix of a Duran Duran video.

To my shame, I am not one of the eighty million human beings who have reportedly attended the stage show. Eighty million! That's nearly the population of Germany, paying good money to hear lines such as "I have brought you to the seat of sweet music's throne," which sounds to me like a fancy name for the men's room. As for the title number, with its rushed descent to a thudding minor chord—"phaaaant'm-of-the-ope-rah-is-heeere"—well, Lon Chaney

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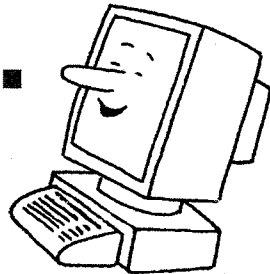


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would have found it too hokey by half, and let's not even mention the drum machine chugging away in the background. I am genuinely curious to know what the eighty million got from Lloyd Webber that they could not get from Rodgers and Hammerstein—or, for that matter, from Puccini, whose ghost is clearly summoned in some of the more writhing arias. Fans of the original production will claim that one had to be there, but then again it presumably bumped into the same stumbling blocks that beset Schumacher's movie. These include: (1) Why does the picky Parisian audience fail to boo when Christine opens her mouth and sings not in the manner of a true operatic soprano but in the moaning, miked-up warbling of every other Lloyd Webber heroine? (2) Is that really dry ice swirling around Christine in the graveyard scene, or is somebody cooking breakfast beneath her outspread cape? (3) When the Phantom finally tears away his face gear, what, exactly, is the big deal? Is there anything wrong with his mug that couldn't be solved by fresh fruit, Botox, and a healthy squirt of Visine?

In short, "The Phantom of the Opera" remains incorrigibly stagestruck. None of the effects will be hailed as special by the average moviegoer, and there is something hoary and semaphoric in the actors' gestures, as if they were meant to be viewed from a distance; the Phantom, for example, keeps swishing his cloak to one side at random intervals, like Batman getting rid of a bad smell. To be fair, his singing voice has its own melodious texture, which is sure to revive fond memories for anybody who has worked in a marble-grinding factory. In the end, all three leads fall woefully short of the mark—deliberately so, I suspect, as if Lord Lloyd Webber had no desire to see his masterwork hijacked, or even heightened, by the presence of an incontrovertible star. As a result, we are left with what the Phantom calls "the music of the night," or what you and I would call a gentle snore. "Touch me, trust me, savor each sensation," he demands. Would you mind awfully if I don't?

The realization that, with Michael Radford's film of "The Merchant of Venice," we are entering very different territory comes in the opening moments. Audiences at the play are often

bemused by the plunging melancholy of Antonio; onscreen, however, a mood is a given thing, and we are content to be lapped within it—all the more so when Antonio is played by Jeremy Irons, whose voice could be transplanted to the cello section of a major orchestra without ado.

We know what will happen to Antonio. He will, on behalf of his friend Bassanio (Joseph Fiennes), borrow money from Shylock (Al Pacino). Antonio's ability to repay the debt will be wrecked by the reported loss of his ships at sea, and Shylock will claim his bond: a pound of Antonio's flesh. The best thing about Radford's film is that the two leading characters, merchant and moneylender, seem, in their separate fashion, to be so steeped in sadness—almost drowning, indeed, in the dense and brackish waters of Venetian society—that you can study their expressions, in the early scenes, and find forewarning of where each of them will stand, or fall, by the end of Act IV. Shylock, of course, does not appear in Act V; once he has been cheated of his legal rights, he tumbles out of the action as if through a trapdoor, back into the murky canals.

The first thing you notice about Pacino is the walk: a splayed and iron-footed tread, like that of a man following a funeral procession. The camera loses its calmness, developing the documentary shakes, as he starts to rail, and under its close scrutiny he has no need to declaim. The big speeches here are not ululations or party pieces; they are the warp and weft of ordinary talk, and even Portia (Lynn Collins), posing as a wispy-bearded lawyer in the court, manages to convert her most famous nostrum—"The quality of mercy is not strained"—back into the currency of argument. After all, she is not tossing a fine-sounding phrase into the air but locking horns with Shylock: instructing him to be merciful, to which he quite rightly fires back with "On what compulsion must I? Tell me that." Only then does she elaborate on mercy, and the intimacy of film allows Collins to speak quietly, dropping the words like rain.

It is curious that Portia should be more convincing as a man, in her un-

convincing drag, than as a lady, but then Radford's film is at its feeblest when the machinery of comic romance starts to creak. The business of the three caskets—one of gold, one of silver, one of lead—with suitors required to pick the lucky one, as a somewhat loaded strategy for winning Portia's hand, is as leaden as ever, despite the fact that lead (and hence Bassanio) carries off the prize. Meanwhile, Radford cannot resist the temptation to light and frame Portia like a Renaissance portrait, as if the noblest aim of cinema were to aspire to the condition of art history. As for Lorenzo (Charlie Cox), you scarcely notice his presence, and what endears him to Jessica (the mysterious and sexy Zuleikha Robinson, who also looks better cross-dressed), the runaway daughter of Shylock, I cannot begin to imagine. When Lorenzo urges her to observe the floor of Heaven, plus its inlay of bright gold, he displays all the fervor of a man pointing out a disco glitter ball. Their duet at the opening of Act V, the most intoxicating verbal ravishment that Shakespeare ever wrought upon us, is chopped cleanly from the movie, perhaps because Radford found himself bereft of an image that could match it. What he does, however, is maintain a pace, hoping to justify his

vast sheddings of the text by driving onward into the bitter bargainings of the second half. He even mines something from the prissy exchanges of the closing scene, in which two husbands give away rings that they had pledged, in marital devotion, to keep for all eternity. For once, their wives' dismay at such treachery, and the resolution of the spat, comes across not as bathetic but as securely locked into the play's obsession with the contractual.

And what of the ethnic toxins that plague La Serenissima? Will they ever end? The anti-Semitism is lazy, state-sponsored, and thus vilely automatic, whereas Shylock's anti-Christianity, stoked by years of grievous harm, glows privately within him, occasionally breaking open like a burning coal, and in Antonio's last commandment (that the Jew become a Christian) you glimpse a vista of further and more profound humiliation. There are too many rancors—hatred of life, hatred of others, hatred of their means to happiness—to contend with here, and the loveliness of the verse beats fruitlessly against them, as if against a wharf. To quote the touching words of one correspondent, posted during an online discussion of this movie, "I didn't like the story." Not much to be done about that. ♦

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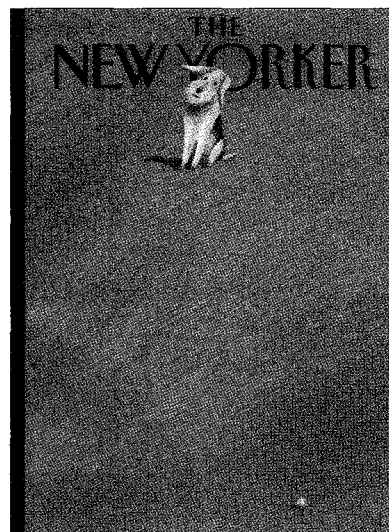
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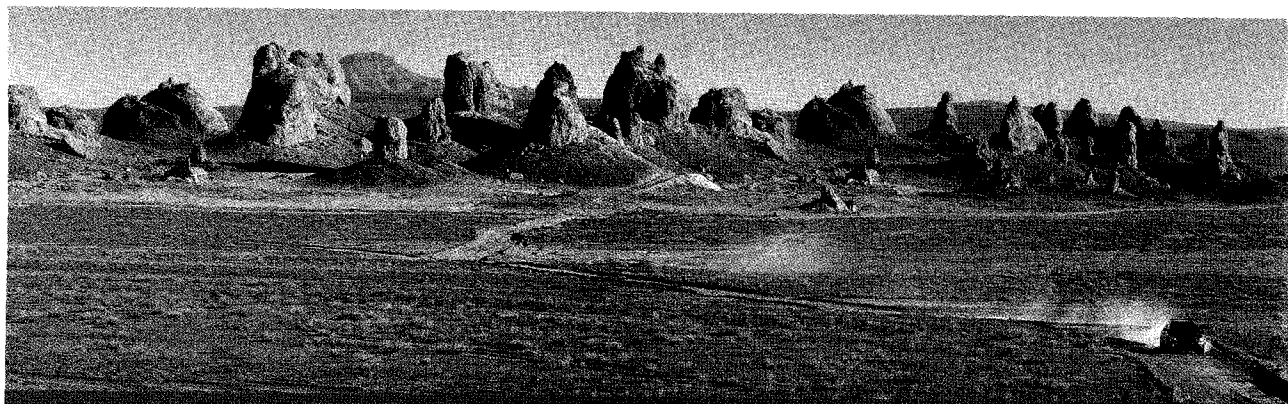
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LAND ROVER DISCOVERY II
NISSAN PATHFINDER
FORD EXPLORER XLS

LOWERED

DEFIED



The all-new 2005 Subaru Outback®. The outstanding traction, balance and control of the Subaru Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive System, standard. The rugged off-road capabilities of an SUV. The power of a 250-hp, turbocharged boxer engine. 0-60 mph in 5.9 seconds. It's time to launch the escape pod. The Subaru Outback. For more information on the Car of the Year in Japan*, see a dealer for a test-drive, visit subaru.com or call 1-800-WANT-AWD.

0-60 mph comparisons based on USAC-certified testing results on the '05 Outback XT (MT), '04 Porsche Boxster (MT), '04 Porsche Cayenne V6 (AT), '04 BMW X5 3.0i (MT) and '04 Audi Allroad Quattro V6 (MT). Outback XT model featured. *2003-2004 Car of the Year Japan. The ABC's of Safety: Air bags. Buckle up. Children in backseat.